KERALA
SOCIETY AND POLITICS
An Historical Survey

E. M. S. Namboodiripad

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political ground on which the central government dismissed the state government and ordered fresh elections.

The Communists are thus to be blamed for getting elected in the first instance : that has never happened in world history ! They are to be blamed for having been thrown out by a combination of 'mass upsurge' from below and dismissal from above: it shows that 'the people' are correcting a mistake committed earlier ! As for the Communists receiving more votes after than before the 'mass upsurge', that of course is of no consequence !

Ever since then, Kerala has attracted the attention of scholars not only in the rest of the country but even abroad. Lying before me are two books: *The First Communist Ministry in Kerala, 1957-59*, by G. K. Lieten, and *Kerala : Yenan of India: Rise of Communist Power, 1937-1969*, by V. M. Fic. This, however, is only a very small proportion of the number of books that have appeared from the pens of foreign and Indian authors. Scholarly articles on the subject have also been appearing in academic journals in India and abroad.

Going through this voluminous material, it can be seen that, with honourable exceptions, the authors invariably paint the Communist movement in dark colours. Not because all of them are anti-Communist by political conviction. They cannot but be directed towards anti-Communist conclusions because they are fed by the newspapers and journals published in Kerala and outside during the nearly half century that has by now elapsed since the Red Flag came to Kerala. Owned and run, as these publications are, by confirmed anti-Communists who have mastered the art of distorting facts and inventing lies in order to blacken the face of the Communist movement, they cannot but draw anti-Communist conclusions.

If one were to make a detailed analysis of the 'facts given', quotations cited and conclusions drawn in these writings, that itself would require an entire volume far bigger than is attempted here. Nor is it necessary for the simple reason that, if even a

small fraction of all that is written were true, the Communist movement should have incurred the wrath of the people of Kerala and been wiped out of the political life of the state. In fact, however, the undivided Communist Party which was supposed to have been 'thrown out of power' by the 'people' in the 'liberation struggle' and defeated in the following mid-term elections secured nearly five per cent more votes than that with which it was voted into an absolute majority in 1957.

What of the post-'liberation struggle' period ? In exactly seven years after the 1960 mid-term election, i.e., in 1967, many constituents of the anti-Communist Front joined the Communists against the Congress and the latter was reduced to a miserable minority of 19 in a house of 133. With all the zigzags in the fortunes of political parties since then, the CPI (M) today enjoys the position of the strongest political party in the state.

II

A refrain that can be heard in the writings of these scholars, as well as in the remarks made by sources which are considered 'knowledgeable' is this : the political life in Kerala is shaped by the ideology and organization of castes and religious communities. Every party, it is seriously argued, bases itself on one or a combination of castes and communities. For instance, it was said in 1957 and the following years that the Communist Party was essentially a party of the scheduled and backward Hindu castes; the Congress, on the other hand, had the support of the Christians, while the Muslim League by definition had the support of the Muslim community. All the subsequent developments in the political life of the state are sought to be 'explained' on similar lines. One is shocked at the shallowness of thinking shown by those who claim themselves to be 'scholars of social science', who are reduced to such 'theoretical' positions.

It is the contention of this author—and he hopes to establish it in the main body of this book—that the Communist Party based itself on the genuinely secular stand which was the hallmark of our freedom movement. It took the firm stand that the State and religion should never be mixed with each other.

Although the Indian National Congress also formally adhered to this principle, its practice, beginning with Mahatma Gandhi and other top leaders, had a Hindu revivalist orientation. This found expression in the Constitution of India which provided for ban on cow slaughter (an essentially Hindu idea) as a 'directive principle of state policy'. The performance of pujas and other religious rites which have become part of governmental functions shows the same trend.

The Communist Party, from the very beginning, was totally opposed to 'spiritualization of politics'. It was and remains pledged to the uncompromising struggle against caste oppression and against the mixing up of religion and the State. It dissociates itself completely from caste and communal separatism.

Such dissociation was necessary for the Party, since it took upon itself the responsibility of uniting the working people belonging to all castes and communities against the exploiting classes with no distinction of the caste or religious faith of individuals belonging to those classes.

It is of course true that the Party did, in the interest of the masses, champion the cause of and support the oppressed Hindu castes and religious minorities. It appealed to the working and oppressed sections of society belonging to the upper castes and to the majority religious communities to include the protection of the weaker and backward castes and religious minorities in the programme of their struggle, since, without drawing these sections into the movement, the class unity of the oppressed and exploited cannot be forged. It however, firmly set its face against any attempt on the part of the scheduled and backward castes as well as religious minorities who try to separate their people from the mainstream of the people's movement for freedom, democracy and socialism. It told the masses belonging to these weaker sections that they cannot defend themselves and advance their cause unless they join forces with the entire democratic movement.

It was such consistent struggle for genuine democracy and

secularism that helped the Communist Party to make rapid advances during the quarter century since the initial foundation of the young Communist group in Trivandrum in 1932 and down to the formation of the Kerala government in 1957. The leaders of the caste and communal organizations naturally opposed the Communist movement since, like the Congress leaders, they represented the same bourgeois and landlord classes. Their lower ranks and mass followers, however, defied them and gave support to the Communist Party.

The two sections representing the same bourgeois-landlord classes—the Congress on the one hand, and the leaders of the caste and communal parties on the other—did, of course, have their mutual contradictions due to which some of the latter gave limited and temporary support to the Communists. This happened in the 1952 elections when the Congress was reduced to a minority in the Travancore-Cochin assembly and had a still more humiliating defeat in Malabar. A repetition of the same result in the 1954 mid-term elections to the Travancore-Cochin assembly and in the elections to the Malabar district board in the same year showed that the Communist Party had come to a position in which it could use the contradictions between two sections of political leaders representing the same classes in order to come very near a majority in elected bodies.

The 1957 election to a newly formed Kerala state legislature was the logical culmination of this process. Hence the eagerness with which the leaders of all caste and communal parties and organizations rallied round the Congress party in the 'liberation struggle' and the following mid-term elections which, however, showed that the Communists' mass base had not only not narrowed but had actually widened.

III

1957-60 may therefore be considered the beginning of a new stage in the political development of Kerala—a stage in which the state unit of the all-India ruling party and that of the Communist opposition became the two poles around which other political forces in the state were revolving. While the Congress

on the one hand and caste-communal leaders on the other were united in the common objective of keeping the Communists out, they had so many contradictions among themselves that they could not remain permanently united against the Communist movement.

The crisis of the anti-Communist Front formed in 1959-60 was so deep that not only did it break up completely but was replaced by the non-Congress Front of 1967 in which several participants of the earlier anti-Communist Front became partners. Having thus joined hands with the Communists whom they had earlier helped throw out, the Muslim League had to join hands with the CPI (M) in the 1965-67 elections which culminated in the formation of the non-Congress government.

This was followed by many twists and turns such as the formation of a mini-front in the non-Congress United Front of 1967-69; the toppling of the 1967-69 government by the mini-front in collaboration with the Congress-Kerala Congress opposition; the coalition governments of 1970-79 in which the Congress, the CPI and RSP collaborated with the Muslim League and Kerala Congress; the infighting that led to the break-up of that coalition culminating in the formation and then the fall of the Left Democratic Front, etc.

In this process of continuous shifts in the positions adopted by the non-Congress (I) and non-CPI (M) parties, the leaders of caste-based and communal organizations and parties have lost a good deal of influence on the masses belonging to the respective castes and communities. This loss among the masses finds expression also in the divisions and splits that have weakened these parties. To cite a few instances :

In the 1960 mid-term elections, when the Congress and the Muslim League had an electoral united front, the Communist Party lost every seat contested in the Muslim majority areas which constitute the present Malappuram district; it, in fact, lost the security deposits in all contituencies except one. In the elections that were held in May 1982, the Congress (I) had the same alliance but could not deprive the

CPI (M)-led Left Democratic Front of its security deposits in any single constituency; one seat was, in fact, won by the LDF, while another was lost by a narrow margin of less than 100 votes; the percentage of votes secured by the LDF was, in most cases, over 40 per cent, showing clearly an erosion of the position occupied by the League among the Muslim voters. The growing discontent among the masses was given expression to by a section of the party leadership who broke from the main organization and joined the CPI (M)-led LDF.

In the districts of Idukki, Kottayam, Ernakulam and Alleppey where the Christians occupy a dominant, though not a majority position, the Congress swept the polls in 1960. Here again, the LDF won several seats in 1982 and secured a substantial percentage of votes even in constituencies where they lost. Like the Muslim League, the Kerala Congress with its Christian base has also got split.

The erosion of the authority of the Muslim and Christian leaders and political parties backed by them and the advance of the Communist movement among the people, are thus clear.

Among the caste-based political parties, the strongest are the Nair-based NDP and the Ezhava-based SRP. Both of them took up the question of reservation on which they whipped up passions among the masses belonging to their respective castes. They also had an electoral alliance with the Congress (I), the Muslim League, the two Kerala Congresses, etc., both in the 1980 and the 1982 elections. The number of seats 'graciously conceded' by the senior partners of the alliance to be contested by these parties and the results of the polling show that, even with the strong support rendered by more powerful partners, these caste-based parties cannot independently make their presence felt in the politics of the state. Internal divisions and splits which have weakened the Muslim and Christian parties have affected these caste-based parties as well.

IV

The facts given here show that the 'theory' advanced by several Indian and foreign scholars who have made a study of the

experiments going on in this 'political laboratory' has no leg to stand on. Caste-based and communal parties and organizations are losing their authority among the common people belonging to the very caste and communal groups whose interests they claim to be championing. They are also getting ever more and more weakened due to internal divisions and splits. The ruling party at the centre which tried to use these caste-based and communal parties and organizations in its struggle against the Communist movement is finding that its efforts in this direction are proving less and less productive.

Why is it so ? Because the main force carrying on a genuine struggle against the caste-based and communal politics of the state is the Communist Party, the CPI(M), and its left-democratic allies. There is every reason to expect that the crisis affecting the parties on the other side and the advance of the LDF would convince larger and larger sections in all parties, including the Congress(I), that the policies pursued by the UDF are proving a serious danger to the entire people of Kerala, to the masses belonging to every caste and communal group.

Indian and foreign scholars who make an over-simplified 'analysis' of Kerala politics as clashes and compromises among caste and communal groups would want the people to close their eyes to these realities; they themselves dismiss all relevant facts and quote only such 'facts' as suit their pet 'theory'. They are supported in this endeavour by certain schools of historians who, in the name of reconstructing 'scientific history', advance the theory that the 'social history' of Kerala is a collection of the separate 'histories' of different caste and communal groups.

The two-volume *History of Kerala* produced by the Kerala History Association containing contributions from the best-known historians in the state, for instance, contains separate sections on social history, economic history, political history and cultural history. The social history section is itself divided into individual chapters, each devoted to a particular caste or communal group, most of them written by a person belonging to the particular caste or group in question.

It is not suggested here that all historians in Kerala today belong to this category. There are honourable exceptions. Unfortunately, however, the evil legacy of caste-based and communal politics is felt among the historians as well. It is in the best interests of the developing unity of radical, democratic and secular forces that an energetic ideological battle is waged against these historical 'theories'.

It was with this objective that the author of this volume made some efforts to reconstruct the history of Kerala. The conclusions drawn by him were recorded first in the *National Question in Kerala* (1952) and its follow-up, *Kerala : Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (1966). Criticisms made by several friends and further studies made by the author himself helped him in writing *A Peep into Indian History*, and *History of India's Freedom Movement*, both written in Malayalam and published in the 1970s. In the light of these criticisms from friends and from the author's own studies, it was found that :

1. The studies made earlier were not related to the history of India and of the world; a new chapter is therefore being added.

2. This failure to relate the history of Kerala to that of India and of the world has led to some serious mistakes in the chapters dealing with the history of Kerala in the ancient and medieval periods; those chapters are therefore being revised, though several passages are being kept unaltered.

3. The approach to the socio-historical evolution of Kerala and its people as a distinct nationality is incorrect; necessary corrections have, therefore, been made in the relevant chapters.

4. The later chapters dealing with the rise and growth of the Communist movement are being revised, with a view to rebutting the anti-Communist slanders which have found their way in the writings of many scholars referred to above.

5. Finally, the earlier volume had come to its end with the formation of the 1967 non-Congress government it is now being brought up to date.

2

India in World History

Down to the British regime, India had no written history. The kings and emperors who ruled over their principalities and empires engaged chroniclers who produced literary works which are partly historical and partly ficticious. The process of delving deep into such literary material and separating history from fiction is a laborious task requiring stupendous effort on the part of a large number of specialists in various intellectual disciplines. The British made a departure from this practice and produced some works for use in schools and colleges which attempted to reconstruct the past of India from the early pre-historic period.

The history that came to be evolved under these circumstances happened to share with the earlier works of royal and imperial chroniclers one characteristic feature : like the latter sang paeans of praise for their lords and masters under the garb of writing authentic history, the former made the glories of their masters the centre-piece of history. The only difference was that the lords and masters of the earlier 'historians' were Indian, while the latter had foreign rulers as their 'benefactors'.

India before the British arrived on the scene was 'uncivilized'; the British came and gave the Indian people enlightenment and culture; India is going forward from progress to progress—such was the essence of 'Indian History' as reconstructed under the British regime. Generations of boys and girls studying in schools and colleges had to study books which listed the 'benefits' derived by the Indian people from British rule. The earlier rulers and emperors like the Mauryas the Guptas and the Mughals were of course mentioned; 'some facts' concerning their times were given; but all this was done with a view to

'proving' how primitive those kingdoms and empires were campared with the 'glorious' and 'benevolent' rule of the British Empire 'over which the sun never sets'.

The resentment against this mode of dealing with Indian history began to spread far and wide among the Indian people when they developed within themselves the new consciousness of modern nationalism. The very consolidation of British rule which, for the first time in history, brought the entire sub-continent under one political rule and which, furthermore, created a new educated middle class, developed the organs of the modern press, etc., created a growing sense of rebellion against British rule. As in other fields of intellectual discipline, this sense of resentment against foreign rule expressed itself also in history, creating generations of nationalist historians who undertook painstaking research and brought out facts to show that India in the ancient and medieval periods was superior in every respect to the British Islands of those days. Some of the outstanding leaders of the freedom movement themselves became well-known historians. A new nationalist school of Indian historians thus started developing, side by side with and in opposition to, the British historians.

While correctly repudiating the anti-Indian thrust of British historians, however, the nationalist school too gave an unscientific and distorted view of history. As opposed to the British historians who condemned the entire pre-British past of the Indian people, the new nationalist historians—bourgeois historians to call them by the correct name—dismissed the entire pre-Aryan history of the Indian people as 'the dark age'. Those who lived in India in that distant past, they claimed, were so backward and uncivilized that they were more or less sub-human; then came the Aryans who brought with them the great and glorious Vedic culture that civilized the then uncivilized people of North India; they then moved towards the South, thus civilizing the entire sub-continent.

This 'history' no doubt served the requirements of the ruling classes belonging to the upper castes of Hindu society. That, however also helped the British overlords, since it showed that

while in the ancient epoch, the Indian people were civilized by the Aryans, they and their successors were not sufficiently civilized, so that they too had to be civilized—a job discharged with credit by the British. The two 'schools of historians' supplemented each other, indicating the common interests of the ruling elite—the British and their Indian subordinates.

II

This entire 'theory' has now been exploded by the archaeological discoveries made over 60 years ago in Harappa and Mohenjodaro which lie in the present state of Pakistan. They show that, long before the Aryans came to and started occupying one part of India after the other, there existed a society and civilization in India which was superior to what was brought by the Aryans. While the Aryans were still in the stage of food-gathering, without yet having a developed agriculture and settled abodes, the people who built the cities of Harappa and Mohenjodaro, whose remains were unearthed in the early 1920s, had already developed agriculture and led a civic life, their society had been divided into classes and they had even begun developing their own script.

How the two cities came to be built and then ruined; how the Harappa-Mohenjodaro civilization (or *the Indus Valley Civilization* as it is known since the area covered by it was in the Indus valley) arose and was destroyed; whether the act of destruction was done by the Vedic Aryans, or whether the civilization decayed and died because of some internal factors—these are still undecided questions, requiring still further painstaking study and research. The fact, however, is undisputed that the history of the Indian people did not begin with the entry of the Aryans from outside. The people who inhabited this area of the sub-continent had, in fact, developed their own civilization and culture, superior to those of the Aryans with their Vedic civilization and culture.

This conclusion is further reinforced by the fact that even in the subsequent phase of Indian history, when post-Aryan society started rapidly developing, two parallel streams of Indian culture

developed at the same time—the Aryans in the North and the Dravidians in the South. It is worth noting that, while the successors of the Aryan immigrants developed a refined language (Sanskrit) for the use of the intellectual, administrative and other allied pursuits of the many spoken dialects (*Prakrits*), so did the Dravidians develop their own elite language, (Sentamil) out of the several spoken dialects of this region (*Kodum Tamils*). Just as the epics like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and so on narrated the heroic exploits of the leaders of Aryan tribes who subjugated non-Aryan tribes, so did the epic works of Sangham literature (*Silappatikaram*, *Patittupattu*, etc.) which sing the stories of the kings and emperors of the South. Facts concerning them and the discoveries made at Harappa and Mohenjodaro led to the emergence of a school of South Indian history which advanced the 'theory' that the South in ancient India was far more developed than the North, that the North subjugated the South by sheer force and deceit.

These various, seemingly contradictory 'theories' of Indian history would baffle an ordinary reader but need not cause worry to a truth-seeking student of history. For, the science of the evolution of the species elaborated by Charles Darwin, of the development of human society discovered by Lewis Henry Morgan and of historical materialism whose broad outlines were drawn by Marx and Engels, enable us to have a fairly correct view of how human society evolved from ancient times and what role India played in the process. Without going into the details, we may, therefore, sum up the broad outlines of Indian history as part of world history.

Firstly, as discovered by Darwin, the species called man progressively evolved from his predecessors, the last of them being the ape who was only one step below the earliest human being.

Secondly, as pointed out by Morgan, having transformed himself from ape to man, the latter began to develop further. The earliest types of human beings had to struggle against nature and, in the process of that struggle, evolve what may be called a social and family life. This in its turn went through

various modes of production, various patterns of social and individual life. Man thus passed through several millennia before he evolved into the modern man.

Thirdly, as was pointed out by Marx and Engels—and this was the signal contribution of the two co-authors of historical materialism—the modern human being in the process of his evolution developed the powers of subordinating nature to his requirements. This enabled a minority to live at the expense of the majority, thus giving rise to the contradiction between a minority of exploiters and the majority of the exploited: 'The history of all hitherto existing society', they said, 'is the history of class struggles.' (*Manifesto of the Communist Party*).

Fourthly, at this stage arose the institution of the State, which arose out of society but stood above it; which, in other words, *resolved* the contradiction between the exploiting minority and the exploited majority in the interest of the former.

Fifthly, from the information available so far, the state which came to be formed for the first time in history was that of Egypt which was over 5,000 years ago; next came the state of Babylonia, nearly 4,000 years ago. Then came India, closely followed by China, both over 3,000 years ago. It is, however, yet to be found out whether the ruins of the Indus Valley civilization, unearthed recently, predated the states of Egypt and Babylonia and whether the people who built the Indus Valley civilization had means of communication with those who built the Egyptian and Babylonian civilizations. It is, in any case, uncontestable that the people of the Indus Valley civilization were more advanced than the Aryans who invaded the areas covered now by parts of Pakistan and parts of the Indian Union; the former, as noted earlier, had already developed agriculture and built cities, had the rudiments of a written script and had divided themselves into classes of an exploiting minority and the exploited majority. The latter, on the other hand, were still living a nomadic life, moving from place to place and living on foods gathered by hunting, by plucking fruits, etc.; they were yet to

develop agriculture and start living a settled life. They, however, had started developing class society in its most rudimentary form in the sense that groups of them were commanded by leaders or *rajas*.

Sixthly, the entry of Aryan tribes into India coincided with a revolutionary change in the socio-economic life of the people; as in many other parts of the world, so in India too, people learnt to mine and work iron. This was of tremendous importance, since it helped the development of farming, handicrafts, navigation, etc. It enabled the people of the area covered by the Aryan migration to clear thick jungles, reclaim land for cultivation, cutting down thickets, uprooting trunks, digging canals, etc. These improved methods of production formed the basis of a new civilization whose outlines can be gathered from the *Vedas* and their subsequent development into the *Upanishads*, epics like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and so on.

It is, therefore, not incorrect to say that the entry of the Aryan tribes made a big change, helped the development of a new civilization in India. It is, however, incorrect for the advocates of the 'theory' of Aryan superiority to claim that civilization and culture in India began with the Aryans. The fact, on the other hand, is that there was a pre-Aryan civilization in the Indus valley—a civilization even more advanced than that of the Aryans when they started coming into the sub-continent. Furthermore, whether directly related or not to the people who built the Indus Valley civilization, the people in the southern part of India, the Dravidians, had already been in the process of independently developing their own civilization. The best and most convincing proof of this is that, parallel to the elite language of the North (Sanskrit) there developed the elite language of the South (Sentamil).

Equally fallacious, however, is the 'theory' of Dravidian superiority advanced by another 'school of historians.' A comparison of the classical works produced in Sanskrit and Sentamil would, for instance, show that the former is far richer, far more versatile. The arts and sciences had so developed in the North that the classical works in Sanskrit stand comparison

with the Greek and other foreign works of the same period. This cannot be said of the Tamil literature of the epoch.

It may also be noted that the social organization based on caste division which itself evolved out of the Aryan *Chaturvarnya* was transplanted to the entire South and, together with the religious lore, the arts and sciences developed in the North became the common property of the North and the South. The socio-cultural life, in other words, was common to the two parts of India, complementing each other.

III

This raises the following questions : what lies at the root of the peculiar socio-economic order which evolved in India after the Aryan invasion. How does it differ from the social order that evolved in Europe and most Asian countries ? How did this peculiar system become the common feature of the North as well as of the South of India ?

The answer obviously is that, as distinct from Europe and most of the other Asian countries, the division of society into an exploiting minority and the exploited majority assumed in India the form of four *varnas* to begin with, and then of the multitude of castes which in their turn proliferated into innumerable sub-castes. Out of the original four *varnas*, three (the Brahmin the Kshatriya, and the Vaisya) formed the 'upper' castes of society, while the fourth (the Sudra) constituted the overwhelming majority of the toilers. Continuous and unceasing development of the productive forces, the ever-increasing quantity of the product appropriated by the 'upper' castes, the technical advances taking place uninterruptedly leading to more and more specialization—these lay at the root of the emergence of 'upper' and 'lower' castes. This, therefore, was not a negation but a *specific Indian form* of the division of society into classes.

Such a social order, *caste in form but class in content*, played the same role in India as slavery did in ancient Greece. Let us recall Engels' analysis of the role played by slavery in ancient

Greece :

> It was slavery that first made possible the division of labour between agriculture and industry on a large scale, and thereby also Hellenism, the flowering of the ancient world. Without slavery, no Roman Empire. But without the basis laid by Grecian culture, and the Roman Empire, also no modern Europe. We should never forget that our whole economic, political and intellectual development pre-supposes a state of things in which slavery was as necessary as it was universally recognized. In this sense we are entitled to say : without the slavery of antiquity no modern socialism. (Engels, *Anti Duhring*, Moscow, 1975, p. 207)

It should be added here that not only the ancient European states of Greece and Rome but the earlier Asian states of Egypt and Babylonia too were based on some kind of slavery. Even the Indus Valley civilization of pre-Aryan days in India had slavery of a sort, as is clear from the pattern of house construction in the remains of the Harappa and Mohenjodaro cities. That slavery of one form or another was not unknown for those who developed the Vedic civilization would be clear from the references to *dasyus*, *dasas*, etc., in the classical works of that civilization.

The *Varna*-caste order evolved in the days of Vedic civilization, however, was different from other forms of slavery, it being inseparably connected with the beliefs and practices of the Vedic religion. Instead of direct and open coercion enforced by the state machinery as in the classical form of European and Egyptian slavery, the *Varna*-caste form had the authority of the religious scriptures : people belonging to all castes and sub-castes were made to believe that it was ordained by God that the majority should submit to the minority in this life and that they would be compensated by the pleasures and happiness which are in store in the next birth. There was, therefore, an element of voluntary submission in the Indian form of slavery, or the superior-inferior relation of castes and sub-castes, which was absent in classical slavery.

The form of Indian slavery which thus came to be evolved in the *Varna*-caste order had one advantage for the owning classes : it prevented the outbreak of slave revolts which shook and very nearly toppled several empires and kingdoms in Europe and Asia. Although brutally suppressed in the beginning, these slave revolts finally succeeded in ending the division of society into owners and slaves. The slave-owning society however was replaced by a new system of class division and oppression—that of the serfs and their masters.

In India too, the class which may be considered equivalent to the slaves, the majority belonging to the 'lower' and 'untouchable' castes, resented their inferior status and the denial of their rights as human beings. However, since *class division* took the form of *caste division* and since it had been sanctified by religious laws, the incipient revolt of the 'lower' and 'untouchable' castes found expression in the birth and development of new philosophical and religious orders. Fierce battles were fought by the *Charvaka*, *Lokayata*, *Sankhya* and other schools of philosophy against the spiritual philosophy of the establishment. In practical life too, dissident sects like those of the Jains, the Buddhists, etc., gave expression to the protest against Brahmin domination over society.

Later on, when caste division with its superior-inferior relationships came to be consolidated, nobody within the Hindu fold being permitted to go out of the caste or sub-caste into which one was born, foreign religious denominations that made their appearance, either through the Muslim conquerors in the North or through the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traders who came to the coastal towns in all parts of the country, became so many ways of escape for the 'lower' and 'untouchable' Hindu castes ; here were doors open before them to escape the sufferings imposed on them by the rigorous caste system. This made it possible for the revolt of the exploited majority being contained not only within philosophical debate and the formation of new religious orders in Hindu society but in large-scale conversions from Hindu to other religions.

IV

This is of special significance for Kerala : over 40 per cent of the population in the state is, as is known, non-Hindu in religious beliefs. It is unbelievable that all of them came from outside, or are descendants of those who came from outside. The overwhelming majority of non-Hindus are obviously those who came to be converted from Hinduism to other religious beliefs.

Among those who were thus converted, the majority naturally came from the 'lower' and 'untouchable' castes for whom conversion appeared to be a way out of their 'low' social status. It is, however, not a fact that no conversion took place among the 'upper' castes. Almost the entire community of Syrian Christians and a large number of the better-off Muslim families take pride in their high-caste Hindu ancestry, claiming that their forefathers were converted from the highest castes, the most respectable and richest families. This is understandable because the rigours of the caste system were suffocating to many who belonged to the higher castes but could not practise the customs and manners obligatory to the 'high-born' ; they too like a far larger number from the 'lower' and 'untouchable' castes, embraced Christianity or Islam.

Unlike in Kerala where Islam and Christianity (together with the Jewish faith) was brought by the trading community who settled themselves in the coastal towns, Islam was brought to the North by successive groups of armed invaders from the Islamic countries. Like the Aryans and other earlier invaders, the Muslim invaders too settled themselves here, absorbing the socio-cultural life of the local people to a certain extent, and making the local people absorb some elements of their socio-cultural life.

This mutual absorption of each other's socio-cultural life was all the more true of Kerala where the followers of non-Hindu religious communities came not as armed invaders but as traders. The fact that a large number of Hindus, including several from high-caste families, got converted to Christianity

and Islam, made the two religious communities absorb elements of "un-Christian" and "un-Islamic" socio-cultural life. This explains why, unlike in the North, there is no trace of any bitterness between Hindus and non-Hindus in Kerala. Even British historians interested in narrating the stories of Hindu-Muslim conflicts in pre-British India could not include Kerala in their list till Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan entered the Malabar region in pursuit of their British enemies.

The entry of Islamic invaders into North India and Christian-Islamic traders into the South and other coastal regions, however, disturbed the calm surface of the *varna*-caste society which came to be consolidated in the centuries following the Aryan invasion. The two religious communities could not of course, destabilize or uproot the essentially Hindu *varna*-caste society. Far from eliminating the inferior-superior relation of Hindu castes, the non-Hindu communities came to be considered 'castes outside the *varna*-caste society'. This gave an appearance of co-existence of Hindu, Muslim and Christian religious communities, each adopting an attitude of toleration towards the other two.

But beneath the surface, the soil was being prepared for the development of hostile relations on the basis of religious ideology which made it obligatory for the devout Hindu to consider the Muslims and Christians as *mlechchhas*. The Muslims and Christians too were obliged to look upon those who followed non-Muslim and non-Christian religious faiths as *kafirs* and *infidels* respectively. The soil was thus prepared for religious conflicts when the socio-political system is subjected to pressures and strains of one kind or another.

It was against this background of social conflicts and political destabilization in society, when the *varna*-caste order as its centre, that the foreign capitalists beginning with the Portugese and ending with the British came to India as traders but entered into political and military deals with the ruling chieftains fighting against one another. As Karl Marx wrote in his article on *The Future Results of the British Rule in India* :

Arabs, Turks, Tartars, Moguls, who had successively overrun India, soon became *Hinduized*, the barbarian conquerors being, by an eternal law of history, conquered themselves by the superior civilization of their subjects. The British were the first conquerors superior, and, therefore inaccessible to Hindu civilization. They destroyed it by breaking up the native communities, by uprooting the native industry, and by levelling all that was great and elevated in the native society. The historic pages of their rule in India report hardly anything beyond that destruction. (Marx, *On Colonialism*, Moscow, 1978, p. 82)

India, however, is no exception. Though there may be differences in details, a host of countries in Asia had the same experience of successive waves of conquerors establishing their domination, forming their kingdoms and empires, but in the process being absorbed in the pattern of life and culture developed by the original inhabitants, while in return they exerted their influence on the life of the original inhabitants. Only in modern times when the European companies started subjugating these countries, first through trade connections and then politically, did a new type of conquerors arise who were alien in every sense of the term. There was, thus, something common to all these countries, while of course India had its caste-based social and family organization which demarcated it from every other country—Asian and European.

Karl Marx in his writings on India, China; Persia and other Asian countries, as well as in his narration of the development of capitalism in the world, tries to give an explanation of what is common for Asia or the Orient—the latter term including some African countries like Egypt. After making a painstaking study of the history, economy and polity of these countries, he noted :

> There have been in Asia, generally, from immemorial times, but three departments of Government : that of Finance, or the plunder of the interior : that of War, or the plunder of of the exterior and finally, the department of Public

> Works. Climate and territorial conditions, especially the vast tracts of desert, extending from the Sahara, through Arabia, Persia, India and Tartary, to the most elevated Asiatic highlands, constituted artificial irrigation by canals and waterworks the basis of Oriental agriculture. As in Egypt and India, inundations are used for fertilizing the soil of Mesopotamia, Persia, etc.; advantage is taken of a high level for feeding irrigation canals. This prime necessity of an economical and common use of water, which, in the Occident, drove private enterprise to voluntary association, as in Flanders and Italy, necessitated, in the Orient where civilization was too low and territorial extent too vast to call into life voluntary association, the interference of the centralizing power of the Government. Hence an economical function devolved upon all Asiatic Governments, the function of providing public works. This artificial fertilization of the soil, dependent on a central government, and immediately decaying with the neglect of irrigation and drainage, explains the otherwise strange fact that we now find whole territories barren and desert that were once brilliantly cultivated as Palmyra Petra, the ruins in Yemen and large provinces of Egypt, Persia, and Hindustan; it also explains how a single war of devastation has been able to depopulate a country for centuries, and to strip it of all its civilization. (Marx, *ibid*., p. 37)

Marx, therefore, drew the conclusion that, like slavery and feudalism which succeed each other, the latter being followed by capitalism in Europe, Asia came to evolve a socio-economic order which he called 'Asiatic'. This formulation made by Marx has become a point of serious debate among scholars. Some of them make the term the basis of their study of every single country in Asia, while others virtually deny the very concept, maintaining that Engels never used it, Marx too did so only once, etc.

It should, however, be noted that, for Marx, the term 'the Asiatic society or mode of production' was not a substitute for the concrete analysis of society and its evolution in individual

Asian countries. To take one instance, Marx who in his writings points to the absence of private property in land as an important element of the Asiatic mode of production, wrote as follows in a letter to Engels on June 14, 1853 :

> As to the *ques ion of property*, this is a very *controversial* one among the English writers on India. In the broken hill-country south of Krishna, property in land does seem to have existed. (Marx, *ibid*., p. 315)

It should be noted further that, apart from 'Asiatic society or mode of production', India shares with several other oriental countries, extending from China in the east to Arabia and Egypt in the west, some common features of historical development.

Firstly, like them, India had developed, in the earliest epoch of history, i.e., the pre-Christian millennia, a civilized society which grew into kingdoms and empires. The Orient or Asia was, in other words, ahead of the Occident in developing human civilization ;

Secondly, all these countries had, in the earliest epoch of history, one or other form of slavery—in the form of *varna*-caste society in India.

Thirdly, Oriental slavery of the early historical epoch was not replaced by feudalism of the western type.

Slavery, however, went through transformations of some type in all these countries. In India, for instance, the *varna*-caste system of the earlier epoch developed into a socio-political system in which a highly stratified, caste-sub caste net work in the village community provided the basis over which a despotic administration came to be built.

Fourthly, in these transformations an important role was played by foreign invasions and conquests, resistance to them, formation and fall of kingdoms and empires, etc. These,

however, did not affect the village community below. Making a specific reference to India, Marx wrote, 'All the civil wars, invasions, revolutions, conquests, famines, strangely complex, rapid and destructive as the successive action in Hindustan may appear, did not go deeper than its surface.' (Marx, *ibid*, pp. 36-7)

Finally, a heavy blow was struck to this socio-political order not because the centralized political-administrative machinery was destroyed but because the socio-cultural life built in the village communities below on the foundation of natural economy was uprooted. The military arms wielded by the foreign adventurers would have been powerless had it not been fortified by the market force of purchase and sale which was the mission of the foreign companies.

3

Pre-Feudal Kerala : Some Problems and Hypotheses

As for India in general, so for Kerala in particular, history-writing begins with the consolidation of British power. The *Malabar District Manual* prepared by the British civilian, William Logan, was the first attempt to trace the evolution of Kerala society. It was followed by the Travancore and Cochin *State Manuals* written by Nagamayya and Achutha Menon respectively.

These early works of Kerala history, however, depend heavily on the mythological story of Parasurama for the origin of the land and people of Kerala. That hero of many battles is supposed to have wanted to atone for his 'sins' and so created a new land out of the ocean. He is then credited with giving the whole of this land as a gift to the Brahmins who were settled on the land. The great hero then fixed the rules of conduct for these newly-settled Brahmins as well as for others, making Brahmins the lords of the land and others their loyal dependents. The descendents of the Brahmins are supposed to be the present-day Nairs and other castes.

This mythological story of Kerala's origin was obviously invented by the landlords, most of whom are either themselves Namboodiris or very close to them in caste hierarchy. They had the advantage of being the only educated people in medieval Kerala. They put down the whole story in writing, *Kerala Mahatmyam* (*Greatness of Kerala)* and *Kerala Pazhama* (*Antiquity of Kerala*) being the two most notable works in this regard. The story thus got wide currency not only by way of passing from mouth to mouth but with the authority of the written word.

The mythological story was later taken over by British historians and their Indian followers. The authors of the three *Manuals* mentioned earlier, for instance, based themselves on the story, though in a modified form. While rejecting the obviously absurd part which relates to Parasurama having created the land out of the ocean, they argued that behind the mythological story of the creation of Kerala lies the truth that Kerala had been submerged in the ocean but was later thrown up by geological processes. Furthermore, behind the mythologioal story of Parasurama having given the land as a gift to the Brahmins lies, according to them, the truth that Brahmins came to Kerala and settled themselves as the lords of the land.

This, however, is no longer accepted as the beginning of Kerala's history by the present generation of historians They on the other hand, point out that Kerala is a land of great antiquity. For evidence, they rely on some archaeological findings which show that human life had started here during the Stone Age; structures built during this period have been found and are being studied for their significance in social evolution. Evidence is, in the meanwhile. accumulating to show that this part of the country was having regular trade connections with Babylonia, Phoenicia, Egypt, etc., in the second and third millennia before Christ. References to Kerala found in such works of the early Aryan period as the *Mahabharata* as well as in Emperor Ashoka's inscriptions are also sought to be interpreted to discover the place of Kerala in the ancient history of India.

All these facts may enable us to draw the conclusion that Kerala was in existence as far back as 3000 B. C. Teak and ivory appear to have been exported from Kerala to Babylonia. We, however, have yet to know how these commodities were produced, what was the mode of living of the people who produced them, how far the mode of production had advanced, whether field cultivation had developed, what were the instruments used in production, etc. Nor do we know the stage to which the arts and crafts had developed, or the manner in which family and social relationships were regulated.

However, the facts brought together so far do not show that

in that epoch of great antiquity, Kerala had a distinct existence of its own. This part of the country was part of the Chera Empire —one of the three South Indian empires. The other two were Chola and Pandya, the three together constituting a system of the political-administrative consolidation of the emerging ruling classes, existing and developing parallel to the Mauryan Empire in the North. This consolidation, as we noted earlier, reflected itself in a distinct language and its literature, Sentamil and the Sangham works which ran parallel to Sanskrit with its epics, works of fiction, science, etc.

The Chera Empire was, of course, more extensive than Kerala, but for some time it seems that one of the coastal towns of Kerala, then known as *Muziris*, the present Kodungalloor in Trichur district, was the headquarters of the emperor. The author of one of the works of Sangham literature is said to have been the ruler having his capital at *Muziris* or Kodungalloor. It, therefore, appears that Kerala had its place in history not as an independent entity but as part of the Chera Empire.

While thus an integral part of the Dravidian social order which was developing in the South as a parallel to the Vedic society in the North, Kerala had, down to the modern age, features of social-cultural life which marked it off from both the northern Aryan and the southern Dravidian pattern. A peculiar Kerala version of the *varna*-caste society, of social and family life, of land relations, etc., marked Kerala off from both the North and other parts of South India.

Various explanations have been given for this peculiarity of Kerala. It is to this job that eminent historians of Kerala from the authors of the three *Manuals*, mentioned above, through such eminent authors as Padmanabha Menon, down to the authors of the recently published two-volume work brought out by the Kerala Association, have dedicated themselves in their researches. The present writer too in his earlier works had dealt with some of the problems posed by these historians. It had been stated there that what was being offered in those works was nothing more than certain hypotheses whose veracity

should be established by further study. The author has since had the opportunity to make further studies based on which the hypotheses made then are being subjected to radical revision. It is hoped that this would help expose some of the baseless 'theories' to which many historians appear to be still clinging.

II

One of the 'theories' propounded by the historians of Kerala which is hardly challenged is that the Vedic civilization of the North was brought to Kerala by the Brahmins whose descendents are the present-day Namboodiris, who not only established the authority of the *Vedas* and other scriptures among the people of Kerala but made their own distinctive contributions to the further development of Vedic culture. The Vedanta philosophy developed by Sankara is cited as a standing example of this.

It is, however, interesting that the original division of society in the North—into four *Varnas*—did not repeat itself in Kerala. In fact, only one of the four *Varnas*—the *Brahamana* has become part of Kerala's Hindu society. The next one—*Kshatriya* is of course there; many of the erstwhile ruling families (the most important being Cochin) belonged to this caste. But the bulk of those who carried on the profession of the *Kshatriya*—warfare—were drawn from outside this caste.

The traditional warriors of Kerala in historical times are the Nairs who, by occupation, combined the functions of *Kshatriya* with those of the *Vaisya* and *Sudra*: they were simultaneously the backbone of the military system, stratum of the cultivating population and did service to the Brahmin and ruling families. Added to these are two other facts :

First, many of the ruling families of Kerala in historical times are non-*Kshatriyas*—including the two most powerful on the eve of the coming of the British and other foreign companies—the Zamorin of Calicut and the Maharaja of Travancore.

Second, the third caste, *Vaisya*, is totally absent in the caste hierarchy of Kerala.

The conclusion is thus irresistible that the break-up of primitive Communism and the emergence of class-caste society took place in Kerala later than in the Gangetic plains. The division of labour had not reached such an advanced stage as to separate the functions of administration, warfare, cultivation and unskilled labour. Only the profession of the *Brahmana*—priest-craft and intellectual pursuits—separated itself from the rest.

The absence of any caste in Kerala's Hindu society whose traditional occupation is trade is particularly significant. Even in historical times, the castes who perform the functions of the *Vaisya* elsewhere are outside the fold of Kerala's Hindu society—the Jews, the Muslims, the Christians and later on the Chettis from Tamil Nadu. Seen against the background of the minute division of castes and sub-castes for each minor occupation, the absence of a caste enjoined on to do trading can lead us to no other conclusion than that the development of trade in Kerala coincided with the coming of foreigners.

It is natural under these circumstances that Kerala should not have thrown up its own conquerors and empire-builders in ancient days. The Gangetic plains had their empires like the Maurya. In the south too, there were the Chera, Chola and Pandya Empires and Kingdoms. They could rise and develop only when the mode of production and technique had developed so far that it became worthwhile to fight and conquer more and more lands, subjugate more and more people. This had become possible in the northern Gangetic plains as well as in the Kaveri delta, but not in Kerala. As a matter of fact, Kerala itself came to be subjugated by the Chera emperors.

Culturally, too, Kerala appears to have been lagging behind the Gangetic plains and the Kaveri delta. The former had its *Vedas* and other literature. The latter had its Sangham literature. The former had thrown up a refined literary language (Sanskrit) which stood over and above the various bulk languages (*Prakrits*) : the latter too had developed its own Sentamil which stood over an above the various *Kodum Tamils*.

The division of labour in social life, the formation of kingdoms and the empires and the emergence of an elite (intellectual, administrative, military and other sections) of the society were accompanied by the development of a more developed culture out of the various tribal or other folk cultures, the emergence of a written literary language out of the various unwritten folk languages.

Kerala, however, had no such development. Its intellectual elite of historical time depended solely on the products of either this or that culture—Sanskrit or Sentamil.

A section of them (obviously the majority) were the followers of the Northern (Sanskrit) culture; they studied the *Vedas* and other sage-produced (*rishi-prokta*) works; they followed the injunctions of these works, applied them in their daily lives; they popularized the teachings contained in the holy books in such forms as are appropriate for the 'low caste people'; some of them even added their own contributions to the knowledge of and discussions on the subjects dealt with in these works.

At the same time, there were others who engaged themselves in the development of the Southern (Tamil) culture. They were the products of the Chera Empire, including some of the emperors themselves. The contributions made by this group to the development of a genuinely Kerala culture can be seen from the fact that the earliest work in Malayalam (acknowledged as such by the historians of Malayalm literature) is written in a language which resembles Sentamil.

In short, Kerala was lagging behind the Gangetic plains as well as the Kaveri delta in point of social (class-caste) divisions, political system (emergence of kingdoms and empires) and cultural advance. But this backwardness was being rapidly overcome. The soil had already been prepared before the Chera emperors had subjugated Kerala: class-caste division had made its appearance with all that it implies. The question was, how will it develop ? What form will it take ?

III

Still another feature which marked Kerala off from the rest of (northern and southern) India is the continuity of the patriarchal and matriarchal joint family system, the matriarchal being far more widespread than the patriarchal. The break-up of this joint family system in fact did not start till the early decades of the present century. The traces of both can still be seen, though the system is very fast breaking up. Engels in his celebrated work *Origin of Family* had in fact referred to the Nairs in India as having the system of group marriages. He said :

> At least, among the Nairs in India, the men, in groups of three, four or more, have, to be sure, one wife in common; but each of them can simultaneously have a second wife in common with three or more other men, and in the same way, a third wife, a fourth and so on....This marriage club business, however, is by no means real polyandry ; on the contrary, it is a specialized form of group marriage, the men living in polygamy, the women in polyandry. (Engels, *Origin of Family, Private Property and State*, in Marx-Engels, *Selected Works*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, p. 491).

He added that 'the certainly not uninteresting origin of this form of group marriage requires closer investigation.' (*Ibid*, p. 491)

Engels was entirely correct on the main point—the existence of group marriage in this part of India. The above statement, however, requires certain modifications.

1. It is not so much among the Nairs, but among some of the more backward castes, that the type of group marriage which Engels describes was universal in his day and prevails, to some extent, even today. (The present writer has himself come across cases of three or four brothers having one wife in common but not among the Nairs, among whom the custom has by and large become extinct for a few generations.)

2. Nairs do not have polyandrous marriages but used to have polygamy and easy divorce. It was only in the 1920s that polygamy was prohibited by law and divorce controlled among Nairs. Even today, however, either the man or the wife can get a divorce if he or she wants it, though it involves procedures more complicated than before.

3. This system of free marriage and easy divorce prevailed, however, not only among the Nairs but among most other Hindu castes in Kerala, the only notable exception among the Hindus being the Namboodiris who have no right of divorce.

4. Even among the Namboodiris, there is a peculiar type of marital relationship that cannot be rationally explained in any other way than that it is a transitional form from group marriage to the patriarchal family. The system is as follows : only the eldest son marries a Namboodiri girl but he takes more wives than one (three is the usual number). The younger brothers take wives from other castes including Nairs. There is a particular stanza in *Sankara Smriti* (the authority quoted in support of all customs prevalent among the Namboodiris) which says that the birth of a son to the eldest brother will relieve the younger brothers of 'the sin of sonlessness', the elder brother's sons being as good as the sons of all the brothers. Only if the eldest brother has no son (even after taking two or three wives) does the younger brother take a wife from his own caste—that too, only in order to beget a son and relieve the family of the 'sin of sonlessness'.

Add to these the fact that impartible joint family is the normal practice in all Hindu castes. The only difference is that, while some castes have the family arranged on the basis of patriarchy, others have it on the basis of matriarchy. Thus, while the Namboodiri has his joint family property passed on from father to son, the Nair has it passed on from mother to daughter. As a matter of fact, if only a decision was made 'that in future the descendents of the male members should remain in the gens and transferred to that of their father' (Engels), the Nair joint family will become the Namboodiri kind - leaving aside of course the additional difference that,

while all the children of the sisters in the Nair family, are members of the family, the children of only the Namboodiri family belong to it.

Looking at these mystifying types of marriage and family relationships from the Marxist point of view—development from group marriage to monogamy—the whole thing becomes clear ; the polyandrous family whose traces are still to be found in certain backward castes is the more or less pure form of group marriage Engels calls the Punaluan family ; the type of marriage which has polygamy and easy divorce but which is dying though not yet completely dead, among the Nairs and several other castes, is one form of transition from group to pairing marriage ; while the type of marriage in which only the eldest brother marries within the caste (and he marries several women) is another form of transition from group to pairing marriage. While the first shows, as Engels says, 'a certain pairing for longer or shorter periods taking place already under group marriage', and gradually 'being supplanted by the pairing family', the second shows a gradual exclusion of the younger brothers from the marital ties that they had under the earlier group marriage.

It thus becomes clear that what seems to an outside observer the strange and mysterious ways of the Malayalees are nothing but the various stages of development of the earlier system of group marriage about which Engels had wisely suggested 'the certainly not uninteresting origin...requires investigation.'

This explanation of the marriage and family system of Kerala down to modern times, of course, requires further investigation. For the moment, it is suggested as nothing else than a hypothesis to work upon. But, even as a hypothesis, it cannot be accepted unless we take up for discussion some basic ideas universally accepted by all the acknowledged authorities on the history of Kerala. We will, therefore, now turn to these ideas and see how far they are correct and how they conform to the above explanation of the marriage and family system of Kerala.

IV

According to a 'theory' accepted by all the acknowledged authorities on the history of Kerala, Malayalees of all castes, except the scheduled castes and tribes, are immigrants. The highest caste, the Namboodiri, it is said, came and colonized Kerala some time between the second century B.C. and the eighth century A.D.; the Nair is supposed to have come earlier than the Namboodiri, though in his case there are some historians who argue that he is not an immigrant at all ; the Ezhava too is said to have come some time just before or just after the beginning of the Christian era ; the Jew, the Christian, the Muslim, etc., are all, of course, immigrants themselves or converts.

These basic assumptions of the history of Kerala are so universally accepted that it is considered to be fantastic to challenge them, to suggest that these people also may have been the descendants of the earliest inhabitants of Kerala. The author of the latest edition of the *Travancore State Manual*, for instance, complains that 'the notion of the migration of peoples has gained such great currency among ethnologists and historians that, in writing the history of a country, they proceed from a fundamental assumption that the earliest people inhabiting any part of the civilized world must have come from some other part.' (Vol. II, *History*, p. 11) Even he, however, agrees that at least the Namboodiris and Ezhavas are immigrants, the former from the North and the latter from Ceylon.

The assumption, however, cannot stand the severe test of criticism from the point of view of the similarity and dissimilarity of social life. For, the organization of family life and property relations of the Namboodiri in Kerala is so similar to that of the Nair, and so different from that of the North Indian Brahmin that it is difficult to accept the theory that the Namboodiris are Brahmin immigrants from the North. As a matter of fact, if one were to examine the problem from the point of view of the organization of social life one would be forced to come to the conclusion that the Nair and the Namboodiri belong to the same racial stock, evolved the same

form of social and family organization, the only difference being that the Namboodiri adopted the social and cultural make-up of the North Indian Brahmin to a slightly greater degree than the Nair.

We have already seen that the mystifying complexities of marriage and family in Kerala cannot be explained except on the assumption that there have occurred a series of transformations in the original family, leading up to the large number of forms of transition from group marriage to the patriarchal family. There are, therefore, very strong reasons to believe that all the castes that are considered caste Hindu (of which the highest is the Namboodiri and the lowest the Nair) were once of the same caste, that there was free intermarriage among them ; that they were all following a type of group marriage (nearer to what Engels calls the Punaluan family than to any other); that certain of these castes began to impose restrictions on the freedom of marriage and to make the transition from mother-right to father-right ; that the caste which imposed the maximum amount of restrictions on the freedom of marriage and the sharpest break from mother-right to father-right (the Namboodiri) became the highest caste, while that which retained the maximum amount of freedom in marriage and divorce and preserved mother-right intact became the lowest of the caste Hindus or *Savarnas* (Nairs).

The difference between the North Indian or even the Tamilian Brahmin, on the one hand, and the Namboodiri of Kerala, on the other, is so manifest that the very tradition, accepted as basically correct by historians, says that the Nair resisted the Namboodiri so much that the latter thought it wise to adopt some of the former's customs. It is, however, highly improbable that a vedic Brahmin taught for generations to observe the strict injunctions of caste rules when getting married should agree to make the taking of a non-caste wife a regular practice in the case of all but the eldest son.

This is as fantastic as the 'theory' advanced by one historian that the Nair had in fact adopted the patriarchal family but

was forced by the Namboodiri to go back to matriarchy. Is it imaginable that either the North Indian Brahmin who came here and became the Namboodiri or the original Nair will, for any reason, give up the pattern of social life to which he had been accustomed for generations ? The only rational explanation for the family organization of the Namboodiri and the Nair can be that the previous system of Namboodiri and Nair boys and girls marrying one another freely was changed to the system under which Nair girls are married to boys belonging to any of the higher castes but not *vice versa*.

The question arises; if that is the case, how is one to explain the universally held belief that the Namboodiri is an immigrant, coupled with the fact he is the only one to represent, though inadequately, the culture of the North Indian Brahmin ? This author for his part does not consider it necessary to dispute that small groups of Brahmins came from the North and settled themselves in Kerala. Nor need it be disputed that it was they who brought the culture of the North Indian Brahmin to the people here. What is disputed, and should be disputed, is that all or even the majority of the Namboodiris are descendents of Brahmins from the North. The development of the original Nair (we will use this term for that caste which comprised all the castes that are today included in the caste Hindu–Savarnas) to the present-day Namboodiri and Nair may probably be as follows :

1. The original Nair was following the system of group marriage and matriarchal family. Since, however, the forces of production were going through such transformations as to lead to the development of economic and social life, the family also must have been subjected to transformations, though we know little about their character. It was brought from the North by the immigrant groups.

2. The Brahminical culture brought by the immigrants from the North influenced certain sections of the original Nairs. Some of them gave up the system of group marriage, introduced strict monogamy for the woman, but continued to allow

loose marriage and concubinage in the case of men who were allowed to participate in the system of group marriage where that was retained. These sections also changed over from mother-right to father-right. Furthermore, they began to study the *Vedas*, etc., but still retained some of their earlier practices like post-puberty marriage of the girls, keeping the tuft of hair not in the rear of the head but in front, etc. These sections of the original Nairs plus those North Indians who came here became the Namboodiris.

3. Certain other sections of the original Nairs were also influenced by the culture of the North Indian Brahmin but not to the same degree or in the same manner. Some of them restricted the freedom of marriage to this extent that their girls were not allowed to marry except within the caste or a Nambodiri ; they, however, retained mother-right. Some others went a step further and changed over mother-right to father-right but did not take to the study of the *Vedas*. All these castes, numbering over a dozen, are together called *antharala jatis*, i.e., castes that stand in between the Namboodiri and the Nair. Each of these castes does, of course, stand in a particular order in the caste hierarchy, performing a particular job fixed by custom—jobs which are either connected with temples or are of service to Brahmins.

4. The present-day Nair is that section of the original Nair which made the least change in the ancient organization of family and social life, the section which adopted the Brahminical culture to the least degree. But even they accepted it to the extent that they began to consider the sections which made bigger changes, to be superior castes.

It may be mentioned in this connection that what actually happened subsequently in the case of Christians and Muslims makes the above process look probable, even logical.

What happended in the case of Christians was that small groups, beginning with St. Thomas according to tradition, came to Kerala, propagated their cult, and converted the local people, beginning with the high-caste people. In this process of con-

version, however, they made such adjustments in the social life of the new converts that the Syrian Christian of Kerala is even today as different from his brothers of other countries as the Namboodiri of Kerala is from his brother Brahmin of other parts of India. The Syrian Christian of Kerala is so proud of his independence from Christians outside that the Portuguese who tried to dominate over him in the sixteenth century had to face stiff resistance, as was witnessed in the memorable incident known as *Koonan Kurisu Satyam* (pledge taken with the Cross of Koonan Hill). Nobody suggests that anything more than a microscopic minority of the present-day Christians are the descendents of those who came from outside.

This is true also of the Muslims ; only a very small or insignificant number of Muslim families came from Arabia. The rest are converts.

If this is how Christianity and Islam penetrated Kerala society, why should it be assumed that Brahminism could have come only along with hundreds of Brahmin families who have continued to remain the sole inheritors of Brahminism ?

Equally unhistorical is the theory that Ezhavas are immigrants from Ceylon. For, it is most improbable that a section of the people constituting nearly 25 per cent of the Malayalee Hindu population today should have come from outside during the last 2,000 years without leaving behind them any trace of their having come and settled here. (Ezhavas are supposed to have brought Buddhism from Ceylon. Hence they could not have come here before the beginning of the Christian era.) And yet historians accept the 'theory' with no other evidence than the extremely far-fetched interpretation of certain words like *ilava* and *thenkai*.

Here again, it need not be disputed that some people came from Ceylon and they had very much to do with the propagation of Buddhism. What is disputed and should be disputed, is that all or even the majority of the Ezhavas are the descendents of Buddhist immigrants from Ceylon. The manner in which the Ezhavas of today evolved themselves is probably that,

as Brahminism brought from the North by small groups was influencing certain sections of the people of Kerala, Buddhism brought from Ceylon by some other small groups was doing the same thing in the case of other sections; and that, while the sections influenced by Brahminism became Namboodiris, *antharala jatis* and Nairs, the sect influenced by Buddhism became Ezhavas.

We, therefore, come to the conclusion that the so-called colonization by the Namboodiris and the Ezhavas is nothing more than a figurative expression for the penetration of the Brahmin and Buddhist cultures brought by small groups of Brahmins and Buddhists and the consequent transformation of the social organization of Kerala. But the penetration of Brahminism and Buddhism has taken place not in Kerala but in other places also. And yet we find that, while Brahminism dealt a crushing blow to the ancient form of social organization in other parts of India, it is only in Kerala that remnants of the earliest form of social organization – group marriage, mother-right, etc.,—continued more or less unimpaired even under Brahminism and Budhism.

V

These differences between the North and the South and between Kerala and the rest of the South do not mean that the Vedic civilization, its off-shoots in the form of Buddhism and Jainism, the impact of Islam and Christianity, the furious debates among the various philosophical systems developed by the Brahminical, the Buddhist and Islamic scholars, etc., left South India generally and Kerala in particular unaffected. On the other hand, the big turmoils on the military, economic and ntellectual planes that rocked North India when successive waves of invasion came from outside, with the consequent conflicts and confrontations between the invading and defending forces, had their echo in the South.

Even though the invasion in their military-administrative form were not so strong and penetrating in the South as in the North, Kerala being still less affected by them, other forms of invasion and aggression did reach the South. At least from the

days of Buddhism, the messengers of the faith reached all corners of India (and even several foreign countries). Their influence was felt on the habits and beliefs of the original inhabitants or tribes everywhere. This, in its turn, was connected with the trade drive launched by the class of *shreshtis* who developed their Southern version of Chettis. These cultural-intellectual and trade contacts between the North and the South completely changed the character of Southern society as it was in the days of Sangham literature.

Kerala, which remained the farthest from the sources of Vedic civilization was also caught up in this intellectual invasion. Its top elite adapted itself to and made its own contributions to the development of Tamil literature in the early epoch as well as to its Sanskrit counterpart later. Many are the authors from Kerala who produced high quality works in poetry, philosophy and various fields of the then developed sciences. By the time of the middle ages, as we shall see in the next chapter, Kerala had developed a highly organized system of land relations and military-feudal administration. The land and people of Kerala were thus not a small island in the vast ocean of the Northern dominated Vedic civilization and its successors. Influenced by the latter to begin with, Kerala became very much a part of it and made its own contributions to it.

4

Towards Linguistic-Cultural Integration

With the evolution of the militarist-feudal system describetid in the last chapter, the main outlines of Kerala as a distinct region of India were clearly drawn—a region which was, in all essential respects, an integral part of India and yet had its own specific features.

The equality and democracy of the pre-historic (primitive communist) society had been completely destroyed. In its place had emerged a new unequal, undemocratic society based on 'high' and 'low' castes. Social life in Kerala was in no way different from the rest of India. Kerala's caste organization was, if anything, even more unequal than in other parts of India: the system of untouchability here was far more rigorous.

This social transformation which took place under the cultural leadership of Brahminism brought the newly-emerging strata of the intellectual, administrative and other elite of society on par with their counterparts in the rest of India. Not only were the artistic, scientific and philosophical works of Brahminical culture fully imbibed by the elite of Kerala, but they also added to them by making their own contributions. Many poets, thinkers, philosophers and so on added to the treasury of Sanskrit literature and are respected for their contributions.

But the representatives of Brahminical culture in Kerala had their own individuality. They did not fully conform to the customs, manners and practices of Brahminical society elsewhere. We have already seen how the system of marriage, inheritance and so on, of the Kerala Brahmin is so unlike those of the Brahmin outside, and so close to those of the non-Brahmin here

that it is difficult to consider him part of the wider circle of Brahmins in India. This, is not confined to marriage and inheritance alone, but touches various other facets of social life.

This is seen from the fact that the Brahmin of Kerala takes as his authority for social customs and practices what is known as *Sankara Smriti*, rather than *Manu Smriti* *Sankara Smriti* is said to be the work of Adi Sankara. This is most unlikely, since the great saint-philosopher is not known to have bothered himself about social customs and practices. *Sankara Smriti* is most probably the work of somebody who reduced to writing the prevailing customs and practices of the time. These are known as *anachoras* (deviations from accepted customs and practices).

This is as true of other religious faiths as of Brahminism. They, too, had to adapt themselves to the special conditions of Kerala. Buddhism, Christianity and Islam came to Kerala successiveiy. Each of them made its distinctive contributions to the evolution of society and ideology in Kerala. But they added something of Kerala to their respective social and cultural lives; they also added something of their religious faith and ideology to the emerging cultural make-up of Kerala. We may see, for instance, Muslim families organized on a matriarchal basis, the practice of untouchability among Malayalee Christians, and so on. We also see that Christians and Muslims have given to Kerala some special forms of folk culture. Modern Malayalam literature and art forms are, in fact, the joint products of the Brahminical, Buddhist, Christian and Muslim cultural trends.

The cultural make-up of newly-emerging Kerala, however, was pre-dominantly Brahminical. Unlike in several parts of North India, Kerala never had a non-Hindu ruling elite down to the establishment of British rule. The Jew, the Christain and the Muslim had their respective places in the socio-political set-up, but they were subordinated to the dominant class-caste, which was caste Hindu. The political-adminstrative system was thus one in which the non-Hindus and low-caste Hindus were second class citizens.

Over and above these differences in the social organization is the big difference in economy and polity which marks Kerala off from the rest of India – the difference arising out of the evolution of private property in land. Kerala does not have the system of village community so vividly described by Karl Marx in his *Capital*. land is not 'tilled in common' as elsewhere; its produce is not 'divided among the members'. It is, on the other hand, tilled individually by each cultivator who, however, has to share its produce with the landlord. Nor are the dozen or so individuals, described by Marx as part of the Indian village community, 'maintained at the expense of the whole community' as in other parts of India: each of these dozen individuals and several others was given some sort of right on the land itself or on its produce. Thus was created the system described as follows by Logan:

> The unit of the Hindu social system was the family, not the individual.
>
> An association of families formed a body-corporate. These guilds or corporate bodies had each distinct functions to perform in the body politic, and those functions were in old times strictly hereditary...The Nairs were the people of 'the eye', 'the hand' and 'the order' and it was their duty 'to prevent the rights from being curtailed or suffered to fall into disuse', [The] *Kanam* comes from the Dravidian word *kanuka* (to see or to be seen) and the root from which that verb is derived is *kan* (the eyes).. So that *kanam* in its original sense seems to have denoted this function of theirs in the body politic...But what was this supervision duty or right (*kanam*)? The *kon* (shepherd, king) and the *pati* (lord, master) had shares of the produce due to them as persons of authority in the land. And the specific word used in the ninth century A.D. to denote these shares [was] *pattam* signifying the *padu* (authority) *varum* (share)...The Nairs were no doubt spread over the whole face of the country (as they still are) protecting all rights, suffering none to fall into disuse, and at the same time supervising the cultivation of the land and collection of *kon* or kings' share of the produce—the public land revenue in fact....

> ...all the state functionaries employed had well-defined shares of the produce set apart for them. The *kon* or king had his share. The *pati* or overlord (the hereditary grantee apparently if there chanced to be one) had likewise a share. And if there was no such *pati* or hereditary grantee, then it seems his share went to the general body of protectors and supervisors—the 'Six Hundred'—the Nayar guild, the *kanakkar*.

But when the right of the Perumal came suddenly to an end, their (*kon's*) share of the produce was, in Malabar at least, certainly not passed on to the chieftains who in some measure supplied the Perumal's place...The chieftains certainly had revenues from their demesne lands, but from the lands of the bulk of those subject to them they levied nothing. The chieftains were hereditary holders *(jenmis)* of the lands from which they derived a share of the produce, and on the other hand, the bulk of their subjects –the headmen of the Nayar protector guild – had likewise become hereditary holders *(jenmis)* of their lands by usurping the *kon's* share of produce .

If the fundamental idea of the Malayalee land tenures is borne in mind, namely, that the land was made over in tract to certain classes for cultivation, the above will be seen to be a most natural outcome of the Hindu system.

II

Thus was created the system of feudal landlordism, the system under which the *jenmi*, the *kanamdar* and other categories of non-cultivating tenants had each of them his allotted share of the produce. This system was subsequently modified and perfected by the British and the Congress rulers. It is, therefore, a target for well-deserved condemnation at the hands of all modern democrats.

But as Engels said with regard to slavery:

> We are compelled to say—however contradictory and

heretical it may appear—that its introduction under the conditions of that time was a great step forward ... It is clear that so long as human labour was still so little productive that it provided but a small surplus over and above the necessary means of subsistence, any increase of the productive forces, extension of trade, development of the state and of law, or beginning of art and science, was only possible by means of a greater division of labour. And the necessary basis was *the great division of labour between the masses discharging simple manual labour and the few privileged persons, directing labour, conducting trade and public affairs, and, at a later stage, occupying themselves with art and science.*

Hence, while fighting our utmost to smash the system of feudal landlordism or its remnants we should recognize, again as Engels did in relation to slavery, that 'it is very easy to inveigh against it in general terms and to give vent to high moral indignation at infamies. Unfortunately, all that this conveys is only what everyone knows, namely that these institutions are no longer in accord with our present conditions and our sentiments, which these conditions determine.'

It was on the soil of the system of feudal landlordism that the various tribes and castes inhabiting present-day Kerala started developing into a linguistic-cultural community. For, the division of labour between the manual and intellectual workers, and the development of the latter from generation to generation, made possible by the allotment of a definite share of the produce to the classes (castes) that did not engage themselves in the direct process of production helped the unification of several dialects into a national language and culture based thereon.

Malayalam as a distinct literary language developed at a very late stage in our history. It was, in its early phase, subjected very much, first to Tamil and then to Sanskrit domination. But we find that, in the centuries after the fall of the Perumals, citerary works in Malayalam begin to get emancipated from the llutches of both these languages and give birth to a really new

national language. Both in poems and other artistic-creative works, as well as in state records of different feudal rulers, we find a gradual development of a style that has the characteristics of a developing national language.

This process reached such an advanced stage by the sixteenth andseventeenth centuries that it may well be considered the period of the formation of real national literature. We find in this period that the works of literature are not merely translations, or weak adaptations, or imitations, of some Sanskrit authors but original works (not, of course, original in the themes but certainly original in the style, imagery used ,etc.): even further, the style and technique of writing were so popular that these works have become the classical works studied in every home, and continue as such even today.

It is not, however, only for the emergence of a national language that the centuries after the fall of the Perumals are remarkable. An equally significant flowering of the arts in general also took place in this period. Hindu temples, Christian churches and Musilm mosques became the centres of attraction for lakhs of common people who were entertained and enlightened through the various forms of religio-cultural activity; it was through these that Kathakali, Ottamthullal, Koothu, etc. developed and acquired the status of national arts. The artistes who developed these art forms and the audiences attracted by them have together created, through generations, a sum total of cultural sensitivity that has come to be part of the distinctive psychological make-up of the Malayalee.

It is true that most of these works of literature, most of these art forms, arose within the narrow compass of one caste or a group of castes: the classical literary works of Malayalam were mostly produced by Hindu authors and dealt with Hindu religious themes; so were Kathakali and other arts mainly of Hindu origin. It is also true that many of these national literary works were confined to upper-class (caste) circles. Nevertheless, these works of literature and art forms have laid the basis for the creation of a style and technique that go beyond all castes and communities; they are truly national. Furthermore, men of

culture, drawn, of course, from the *upper classes but of all castes*, began to appreciate and even adopt this style and technique in their own particular caste or religious circles. (The Chavittunatakam of the Christians is an adaptation of the Hindus' Kathakali).

This flowering of literature and the arts was nothing but the expression of the development of that 'community of economic life, economic cohesion' which, as is known to Marxists, is one of the characteristics of a nation. It was the absence of this community of economic life that led to the fall of both the Chera and the Perumal Empires. But the development of production and exchange which took place after the fall of the Perumalas – the introduction of cash crops like coconut; the adoption of certain processes of utilizing primary produce for further (secondary) production; the development and perfection of some crafts; exchange of many products locally or even with the outside world; etc.—led to the development of domestic and foreign trade, greater and greater use of money, mortgage or sale-purchase of land, etc.

Thus was emerging, slowly and through the generations but nonetheless unmistakably, that pre-requisite for the formation of a nation—the national market. It was this, as is well-known, which attracted first the Arabs, then the Portuguese, then again the Dutch, the French and lastly the British, to the coastal towns of Calicut, Cochin, Quilon, etc., where they opened their factories and started trade. A change was also taking place in relative importance of Hindu and non-Hindu religious groups. The bigger role played by trade in the economic life of the people was giving added importance to the Christians and Muslims who were partly filling the gap which the absence of the *Vaisya* caste in Kerala had created.

This had its impact on the political-administrative system, too. For, the growth of trade necessitated a steadily expanding home market which, in its turn, made petty kingdoms ineffective and outdated. The progress had to begin and did begin.

The Zamorin of Calicut and the Rajahs of Cochin and

Travancore were the rulers who strengthened themselves most at the expense of petty kingdoms. Every one of them claimed the right to become the Emperor of Kerala the Zamorin on the ground that he was the direct descendant of the Perumals, because the son of the last Perumal was the founder of the Zamorin dynasty; the Rajah of Cochin on the ground that the sister's son of the last Perumal was the founder of the Cochin dynasty; the Rajah of Travancore on the ground that he was the direct descendant of the Chera emperors. Which one of these three mighty rulers of Kerala was to become the emperor – this was the issue to be settled.

These rulers, however, were not satisfied with expansion within the geographical territory, of their kingdoms. They also demanded an extension of their political power, a restriction of the powers of feudal chieftains, temple associations etc. They wanted to put an and to the system under which both militarily as well as administratively, they were dependent on their feudal subordinates. They were, in short, trying to establish a type of state under which the ruler was supreme and the Naduvazhis Desavazhis and *jenmis* were under the absolute sway of the ruler.

With a view to the establishment of such a state they organized a system of ruthless terror against their feudal opponents. Many are the stories of conflict between the ruler and his feudal satellites, both the one and the other resorting to identical methods in asserting their rights. As the biographer of one of these rulers says, they 'conciliated those who deserved it; squeezed those who could be squeezed; helped those who deserved help; destroyed those who were to be destroyed – all this with a view to establish the principle of *one state, one ruler*.'

III

Does this mean that the process of the formation of nationalities, witnessed in Western and Eastern Europe when capitalism was developing there, was repeating itself in Kerala ? Was the same development taking place throughout India ?

The answer given by this author in his earlier writings—*National Question in Kerala* (1952) and *Kerala : Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (1965)—gave an affirmative answer to these questions. The chapter dealing with these developments was in fact titled 'The Birth of a Nation'. What was thus happening in Kerala was sought to be related to similar developments in other parts of the country.

This formulation was subjected to serious criticism by several authors, including the eminent Marxist historian, Prof. Irfan Habib, who pointed out that the development of modern nationalities or nations is inseparably connected with the emergence of capitalism and that this was absent in pre-British India referred to in this author's writings on Kerala. A distinguished Marxist scholar, Prof. Amalendu Guha, made a valid distinction between what he called 'regionalized communities of culture' which emerged in pre-British days and the nationalities that had been developing in the struggle against the British rulers. The former do not come under the category of nationalities or nations in the making. The emergence of the national movement had, it was pointed out, combined two processes : (1) development of the consciousness that Indians are a nation fighting for independent statehood; (2) the consciousness of belonging to one's own linguistic-cultural group.

The points of criticism made by these scholars are correct, This author did overestimate the extent of the development which took place in Kerala and in the rest of the country during the centuries immediately before the British became the rulers of the country. The linguistic-cultural unity towards which the people of Kerala and other parts of the country were moving can never be considered 'nations in the making' not to speak of 'nations being born',

The question however arises; did the emergence of these 'regionalized communities of culture' make no difference at all as if Indian society was continuing unchanged after their emergence ? In other words, why did these communities start developing in the couple of centuries before the British conqus, est and why, having emerged as distinct socio-cultural entiti-e

did they fail to develop into nationalities or nations, as they did in Europe ?

The foregoing description of the pattern of social development in Kerala would help in finding answers to these questions. For several of the *Kodum Tamils* or unwritten folk languages came to be merged into the single Malayalam language, clearly demarcated from the sister languages of the elite in the South i. e. modern Tamil, Telugu and Kannada at a particular stage in the development of society. The earlier primitive communist, or tribal society, was battered down by the developing *Varna*-caste society and led to the development of productive forces, the further deepening of the division between the 'upper' and 'lower' castes, culminating in the emergence of the militarist-feudal political regime. These developments also led to the development of trade relations including those with foreign countries. Sizeable numbers of Jewish, Christian and Muslim traders came and settled on the coastal towns of Kerala.

This, however, was true of the entire country. Ever since the disintegration of the primitive communist tribal society at the hands of the Aryan invaders and the formation of the *Varna*-caste society a process of social consolidation and development had been unleashed. Wars of conquest and defence, the rise and fall of empires and kingdoms, extension of internal and foreign trade (though on an extremely meagre scale in comparison with Europe), the influence of the arts and sciences combined to throw up an intellectual, military-administrative and commercial-moneylending elite – the three *Varnas* of the *Chaturvarnya*, but including sections of non-Hindus. It was such an elite which helped the emergence of over a dozen modern Indian languages out of the scores of *Prakrits* in the North and *Kodum Tamils* in the South.

It will, no doubt, be erroneous to equate this elite of Indian society with the growing bourgeoisie of Europe about which Marx and Engels observed : 'The bourgeoisie has played an extremely revolutionary role upon the stage of history. Whenever the bourgeoisie has risen to power, it has destroyed all

feudal patriarchal and idyllic relationships.' The intellectual, military-administrative and commercial-moneylending elite of our country, on the other hand, played its conservative role, clinging to all that is outmoded in Indian society. It therefore, could not with stand the onslaught launched by the European bourgeoisie which came originally with trading missions, but ended with subordinating the country, its economy, polity and culture to a foreign occupying power.

Unable to resist the economic, military and political offensive of the European bourgeoisie, India's ruling classes could not carry forward the process of linguistic-cultural integration that had started with the Bhakti movement. The cause of linguistic-cultural development was, along with developments in others fields, sacrificed at the altar of foreign occupation.

Let us see how this happened in Kerala.

IV

It was in 1498 that Vasco da Gama landed in Calicut. Although he was welcomed by the Zamorin, the Arabs who had already entrenched themselves there prevented them from getting a foot hold. Gama therefore went to the other port towns in Kerala —Quilon, Cochin, Cannanore - where he was more welcome. In a few year's time, the Portuguese established themselves safely on the entire western coast stretching from Goa in the north to Quilon in the south.

The basic policy pursued by the Portuguese in Kerala was to take advantage of the political rivalry between the Zamorin of Calicut and the Rajah of Cochin. The former had already brought all the feudal chieftains in what subsequently became South Malabar under his suzerainty, extended his power and influence to a part of Cochin and was on the point of overpowering the Rajah of Cochin himself through sheer physical force. The Cochin ruler was, therefore, in desperate need of help for maintaining his position—help which the Portuguese were in a position to give. The Portuguese were themselves in need of an alliance with the Rajah of Cochin not only in order

to get facilities for trading but also for them to be in a position to wreak their vengeance on the Arabs in Calicut. It was thus that, in the five successive wars waged between Calicut and Cochin during the 165 years of Portuguese ascendancy (1498-1663), the Rajah of Cochin saved himself from being devoured by the Zamorin, while the Portuguese saved themselves from their Arab rivals.

The alliance between the Portuguese and the Rajah of Cochin led to other similar alliances—with the Quilon and Cannanore rulers. The terms of all these alliances were substantially the same, fixing the price of pepper, agreeing to give the Portuguese a monopoly in buying pepper, recognizing the supremacy of the Portuguese in naval matters, exempting the Portuguese from taxation, giving the Portuguese captain alone the authority to try and punish offenders from among the Portuguese and native Christrians etc. These agreements were thus the beginning of the process through which the rulers of Kerala were surrendering their sovereignty to foreign traders. What was attempted without any effect by the Cheras and the Perumals was thus accomplished by the foreign capitalists.

While the Portuguese were using the Rajah of Cochin against the Zamorin and thus establishing themselves in Kerala, their trade rivals, the Dutch, were becoming a powerful force. They landed on the Kerala coasts almost a century after Vasco da Gama, but, using the same policy of setting one ruler against his rival, they very rapidly strengthened themselves. An internal family quarrel was taking place at that time in the ruling family of Cochin and one of the princes sought the assistance of the Dutch who had already established themselves in Ceylon. The Dutch seized upon this golden opportunity, helped the prince to ascend the throne and in the process eliminated the Portuguese from their supremacy in Cochin, indeed from Kerala altogether. The Rajah of Cochin who was thus put on the throne by the Dutch became their virtual vassal. They were, even in official correspondence, referred to by the Rajah as 'the masters'. After thus establishing themselves in Cochin, they turned to other princes with several of whom they signed trade pacts.

The Dutch, however, could not become masters of Kerala because they had rivals in the English. Since the Dutch were very powerful in Cochin, the English turned their attention towards North and South Cannanore and Tellicherry in the north where they established their factories, and Quilon and Trivandrum in the south. Just as the Portuguese strengthened themselves by 'helping' the Rajah of Ccchin, just as the Dutch used the quarrel in the ruling family of Cochin to establish their virtual rule through a puppet prince, so did the English use the ambitious prince of Venad, Marthanda Varma, to establish their supremacy.

That prince was one of those rulers of Kerala who wanted, on the one hand, to expand the geographical territory of their kingdoms by annexing neighbouring kingdoms and, on the other hand, to curtail the power of the feudal chieftains under them. It was he who, in one generation, expanded his kingdom from a petty principality of a few dozen square miles to the later state of Travancore and is thus rightly considered 'the builder of modern Travancore'. He was able to do this only because he skilfully and successfully utilized the rivalry between the Dutch and the English. The English for their part knew that by strengthening him they were strengthening themselves. Nor did he or his successor fail them, for it was the powerful King of Travancore who was the one supporter they had in Kerala when they had to fight and overcome the combination of Mysore and the French.

But, as soon as the Dutch and the French-Mysore combination of rivals were overcome, the English treated the Rajah of Travancore in the same way as the Portuguese and the Dutch had treated the Rajah of Cochin. The treaty of 1795, together with its modification by the new treaty of Colonel Munro as Resident-Diwan, made Travancore a tributary kingdom of the English in the full and real sense of the term.

This reduction of Travancore, the strongest of the rulers of Kerala, to the status of a dependent vassal of the English, together with the transfer of the allegiance of the Rajah of Coc-

hin from the Portuguese, the Dutch and Mysore to the English and the assumption of direct English authority in the rest of Kerala, made the end of Mysore (Tipu Sultan) the beginning of British rule.

V

The establishment of British rule stabilized the political divisions of Kerala as they existed at the end of the eighteenth century, i.e., permanently divided Travancore and Cochin, both from each other as well as from the rest of Kerala; it divided the nationally Tamilian part of South Travancore permanently from the rest of Tamilnad. Thus was the natural process of the formation of nationalities artificially checked by the violent interference of a foreign imperialist power.

We will see further on that this intrusion of imperialist powers was resisted by the people of Kerala who have written some of the most glorious chapters in the history of the anti-imperialist movement in India. It, however, remains true that the ruling classes as a whole acquiesced in the loss of their freedom and the freedom of their subjects though in the beginning a small section joined in the anti-British struggle. The ruling families of Travancore, Cochin and Calicut gave up their mutual struggle for the title of the Emperor of Kerala, all of them accepting the British as their lord and master. So did the lesser ones of the feudal hierarchy –The Naduvazhis, Desavazhis, Madambis, etc., those of them who survived the process of liquidation started by successive rulers in their attempt to set up a strong administration—accept Britain as the sovereign ruler of the land. The Namboodiris for their part also gave up their claim to be the spiritual leaders of Kerala society and accepted the supremacy of the British in all respects, including the spiritual. All sections of the ruling classes were, in fact, trying their utmost to salvage some of their former glory and, to this end, trying to gain the favour of the new supreme ruler.

The British rulers for their part knew that they would be unable to stabilize their rule unless they got the willing consent of the former ruling classes, unless they made them loyal ad-

herents of the new regime. They, therefore, set themselves the task of making such adjustments in the state system as would satisfy the vanity of the former rulers.

The acceptance of Travancore and Cochin as separate states ruled by the dynasties that had ruled for centuries was, of course, the first step. But that was not all. Other families like those of the Zamorin of Calicut, the Rajahs of Chirakkal, Arakkal, Kottayam, Kadathanad, Yalluvanad, etc., were also given various privileges including regular pensions. These families were even allowed the vainglorious formality of 'succession to the throne': that is, when the eldest male member of one of these families dies, the next seniormost male member is allowed to perform the formal ceremony of taking the *gadi*.

As for the Namboodiris and other non-ruling families, they were given back all the lands that they had once owned and, what is more, were made full owners of these lands with no restriction whatsoever in their relations with the tenants. The establishment of British rule, therefore, did not deprive any family belonging to the former ruling classes of the rights and privileges enjoyed by them, except to the extent that those of them who were ambitious enough to dream of extending their territories were stopped from further efforts in that direction.

All this, however, does not mean that things remained as they were. On the contrary, the very establishment of British rule was the biggest shock administered to the hitherto tranquil social order of Kerala, an order which had been built up through centuries. For, the state system that was set up by the British was meant precisely to further carry forward the process that had started within Kerala's social order—the development of market relations. We will see in the next chapter how the establishment of British rule hastened this process and brought Kerala into the arena of the world market, we will also examine in subsequent chapters the tremendous socio-political changes that have made Kerala an active partner in the democratic and socialist revolutionary movements of India and the

world. It is sufficient at this stage to note that the force that brought about these upheavals was the state system set up by the British. The changes brought about in the state system of Cochin by Colonel Munro, the British administrator who functioned both as Resident and Diwan of the two states of Cochin and Travancore and who in that capacity made the administrative system of these states such as to serve the need of British supremacy, are described as follows by the author of the *Cochin State Manual* :

Administrative Reforms: The Karyakars, who were placed in charge of Taluks when the chiefs were divested of their administrative powers, had hitherto combined in themselves all the functions of government. They were not only revenue and executive officers but were Munsiffs, sub-Magistrates and Police Inspectors. They were now divested of their judicial and police powers, and their duties were confined to the collection of revenue. For the proper administration of justice, two subordinate courts were established at Tripunittara and Trichur in 1812, each presided over by a Hindu and a Christian judge and a Sastri, and a Hazur court presided over by four judges including the Diwan. Justice was to be administered according to the *Dharma Sastra* and the customs and usages of the country, but a simple code was enacted for guidance of the judges in the matter of procedure. A force of police or Tannadars was organized and placed under Tanna Naiks, one for each Taluk, the supervision over the Naiks being vested in an officer attached to the Hazur under the designation of Daroga. These Tannadars had the duties of the modern police and preventive forces combined in them. Court fees began to be levied according to a definite scale, and stamped *cadjans* were introduced for engrossing documents. Between 1812 and 1816, a large number of proclamations and *hukumnamas* were issued defining the duties and powers of judicial, police and other officers. A definite scale of pay was established in the place of the indefinite exactions which the officers had hitherto been authorized to make, and some provisions were also made for granting pensions to retired

officers. Several of the vexatious imposts which pressed heavily on particular individuals or classes, and transit duties on grains and food stuffs, were abolished, and all arrears of revenue which remained uncollected till 1809 were relinquished. Several roads and bridges were constructed, though of a primitive pattern, and a large number of Sirkar Buildings, which had through the neglect of years fallen into a dilapidated condition, were repaired or reconstructed.

Revenue and Finance: The system of farming land revenue, customs and forests which had hitherto been in force, was abolished and Sirkar officers were appointed to collect these revenues directly. Vigorous measures were taken to extract large quantities of teak departmentally, while junglewood and minor forest produce were allowed to be removed by the people on payment of duty at the Chaukai (inland customs) stations. Preventive measures were taken to minimize the smuggling of tobacco and pepper which were articles of Sirkar monopoly, and salt was also made a monopoly article. The Devaswams and Uttupuras (religious and charitable institutions), which had in recent years been grossly mismanaged were placed on a satisfactory footing, and a definite scale of expenditure was laid down for their maintenance. An accounts department was organized and a system of accounts introduced, similar to the one then obtaining in the Company's territories. Thirty-three vernacular schools were established, one in each Pravritti, with a view to turn out a number of young men fit to be entertained as writers and accountants under the Sirkar. The successful carrying out of these measures obviously involved an immense deal of labour and difficulty, but Colonel Munro and Captain Blacker had the satisfaction of seeing their labour bear excellent fruit. The land revenue rose from Rs. 2,85,000 in 1811-12 to Rs. 3,27,000 in 1816-17, tobacco from Rs. 21,000 to 157,000, customs from Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 35,000, salt from Rs. 2,000 to Rs 63,000 and forest from Rs. 10,000 to Rs, 62,000, and the total revenue from Rs. 4,96,000 to Rs. 7,55,000. The Rajah's Government was thus enabled during these seven years to pay off all arrears of subsidy and war

> indemnity and also the major portion of the debts due to private parties, and His Highness expressed his immense satisfaction at these achievements in a remarkable letter to the Governor-General. 'Since Colonel John Munro was appointed Resident in my country in the year 1811', he said, 'that gentleman has by his indefatigable exertions and vigilance rescued me from an ocean of debt in which I was unfortunately involved by the corrupt and treacherous conduct of my ministers, and has enabled my self, my family and my subjects now to live happy and unconcerned, which favourable circumstances I cannot in justice avoid bringing to the notice of your Lordship in Council. (Pp. 150-2)

That the same changes were made in Travancore, too, has been explained in the *Travancore State Manual* (Vol. IV, Pp. 2-6).

Needless to say, this was in keeping with what was done in Malabar and other parts of India. The only difference was that, while in Malabar and other parts of 'British India' the Collector or other British officials were the direct authorities appointed by and responsible to the representative of the British King (the Governors and the Governor-General), the Diwan, Peshkar and other officials in the 'Indian states' were under the authority of the Rajah who was formally a 'sovereign' monarch 'allied to the British'. How 'sovereign' the ruler is, was seen on a number of occasions in various Indian states. Cochin, too, saw it during the First World War when the then ruler of the state, suspected to be conspiring with the Germans, was forced to abdicate. The fact is that, with all the paraphernalia of a ruling dynasty, the Cochin and Travancore families were mere cogs in the wheel of British administration, real authority resting not with these rulers but with the Resident or Political Agent and through him, with the Viceroy of India.

These cogs in the wheel of administration were, however, maintained by the British because they could not risk the dissatisfaction that their elimination might cause in the feudal circles. The main purpose for which the state system was

reorganized by the British being the most effiicient exploitation of the people, it was necessary for them to associate as wide sections of the ruling circles as possible with the administration of the the country. Nothing would have served this purpose more than the maintenance of the ruling dynasties of Cochin and Travancore in the full enjoyment of their former privileges, provided, of course, they were made harmless in the actual enjoyment of political authority.

It may be mentioned in anticipation that this is the very policy that was continued by the Congress for some time after the transfer of power to India ; the policy of 'integration and merger of Indian states' not only maintained the privileges of the ruling families but also continued the artificial division of nationalities like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra, etc. Big struggles had to be waged against this before the reorganization of states more or less on a linguistic basis was agreed to.

The establishment of British rule, therefore, meant that all that was progressive for the time in the medieval social order of Kerala was suppressed and all that was reactionary was stabilized. The cherished desire of successive generations for the unity of Kerala was suppressed. The emerging unity of the people was broken by the artificial cutting up of the region into three administrative divisions. The efforts at reforming and modernizing the administrative system, made by successive rulers of various kingdoms, were carried forward not to lay the basis for reforming and modernizing the entire social system, but to enable the British rulers to carry on their alien rule. The powers and privileges of the former ruling classes were curtailed, not in order to introduce democracy, but in order to establish the foreign imperialist rule in which the former ruling classes willingly acquiesced. The process of the liuguistic-cultural integration of the Malayalees, as that of the other peoples throughout India, came to be an inseparable part of the Indian people's struggle for national liberation, directed against the British rulers and their Indian collaborators.

5

From Militarist-Feudal To Colonial-Feudal Economy

The establishment of British rule started the process of changing the traditional mode of production in the country, replacing the production of articles mainly for one's own use by production for the market. It however prevented the natural development of the new mode of production to capitalist production on the basis of modern large-scale industry and the application of modern science to agriculture as it did in Britain itself. The result was that, while production as a whole took gigantic strides forward, this advance of production did not make those fundamental changes in the social order that usually accompany the capitalist transformation of a country's economy.

This can be seen in the fact that, even after a century-and-a-half of British rule, Kerala still had a predominantly agrarian economy at the time of Independence. The prosperity and poverty of individuals and families were judged on the basis of how much land they owned, as they used to be judged in pre-British days.

According to the 1941 Economic Survey of Travancore, 1173 families (out of a total of one lakh families whose family budgets were investigated) had an annual income of Rs. 1200 and above. Out of these 1173 families, however, there were 520 families whose means of livelihood were the professions, i. e., occupations which are not productive in the scientific sense of the term. Out of the remaining 653 families, 325 had land as their main source of income.

According to the same survey, there were 20,199 families

with an annual income below Rs. 60. Of these 11,353 were absolutely landless. In the next income group (Rs.60 to Rs.120), there were 38,992 families of whom 17,533 were landless. Thus the two lowest income groups (which together constituted nearly 60 per cent of the total families) had 56.8 per cent and 44.9 per cent respectively with absolutely no land. On the other hand, in the highest income groups—above Rs. 3600 and between Rs. 2400 and Rs. 3600—8 per cent (15 families out of 181) and 15 per cent (23 out of 183) alone were absolutely landless.

Furthermore, in the four lowest income groups (those below Rs. 300 per year) together, 43 per cent (38,877 families out of 90,152) were landless, while in the four highest income groups (those above Rs. 1200) only 16 per cent (190 families out of 1173) were landless.

According to an earlier (1931) survey, the total national income of Travancore was just over Rs. 20 crores, of which over 50 per cent (10.5 crores) was income from land (including wages of agricultural labourers, rent of landlords, interest on capital and profit of cultivation). When it is borne in mind that the balance includes the income of professionals and such other categories as are not productive in the scientific sense of the term, it becomes clear that the main source of national income was agriculture.

Figures showing such overall economic conditions are not available for the other parts of Kerala—Cochin and Malabar. In 1936, however, the Government of Cochin conducted a survey of some typical villages in the state. Figures collected in the course of this survey show that, in the case of the rural economy of Cochin, agriculture played a predominant role.

For example, the total assets of all the families in Anthikkad village were valued at Rs. 12,58,788. Out of this, Rs. 7,13,946 or 56.7 per cent was the value of land. Similarly, the villages of Chundal, Eruttempadi, Pattancheri, Venganallur, Vallivattom and Tiruvazhiyad had 63.7 per cent, 53.7 per cent, 42.5 per cent, 54.2 per cent, 66.7 per cent and 62.4 per cent respectively

of their total assets in the form of value of land. Adding up the figures of all these seven villages, we find that 55.4 per cent of the total assets (Rs. 40,59,704 out of Rs. 73,68,753) was value of land.

This was not all. There were other items to be taken into account—the value of buildings, improvement on land, agricultural implements, and amounts lent out. Some of these items are solely and directly related to land (value of improvements on land and value of agricultural implements), while others are also almost entirely connected with land (e. g., the major part of amount lent out was the indebtedness of either cultivators or landlords). It will, therefore, be reasonable to include these also in the category of assets based on land. All these together constituted 91.4 per cent, 95.9 per cent, 85.3 per cent, 90 per cent, 92.8 per cent, 93.6 per cent and 95.3 per cent respectively in the above villages.

It may, therefore, be assumed that no less than 90 per cent of the total assets of an average village in Cochin was directly or indirectly related to agriculture. If it is borne in mind that even such instruments of production as the handloom, other implements of artisans (carpenter, smith, fisherman, boatman, etc.) as well as the assets of some of the small industrial establishments that exist in the village, are included in the balance, it will be seen that in the villages of Cochin agriculture dominated over other forms of economic activity.

The inclusion of urban areas will, of course, relieve this domination of land to a certain extent. But it would not alter the picture basically. For, apart from two textile mills and one large-scale oil-soap works (Tatas) that existed then, much of the industrial establishment in Cochin was of small or medium size. It would, therefore, be correct to say that, even if the rural and urban areas were to be added together, agriculture dominated over other forms of economic activity.

II

The domination of land over the economy as a whole does not, however, mean that land plays the same role in the economy as

it did in pre-British days. Land had, on the other hand, undergone a big transformation.

It is true, as we have already seen, that unlike in other parts of India, land in Kerala had started developing as private property even in pre-British days. But this development of proprietary interests in land was taking place within the framework of a predominantly natural economy. The major part of what was produced on land was being consumed within the village or in the neighbouring villages, while the major part of consumption goods was locally produced. This order of natural economy received a shattering blow from the British rulers and, as a consequence, land came to be no more used for the production of goods to be consumed by the producer himself, but for the production of commodities.

Take rice, for example. Four or five centuries ago, Kerala was self-sufficient with regard to this primary and most essential need of human life. Today, however, local production is less than 50 per cent of consumption, nearly 60 per cent of the local need being supplied from outside. No other province in India is so deficit as regards food as Kerala.

According to the *Travancore State Manual*, the average annual import of rice during the seven years 1050 to 1056 Malayalam Era (A. D. 1874-5 to 1880-1) was to the value of Rs. 12,11,611. This grew in the next five decades to Rs. 15,00, 380, Rs. 24,70,120, Rs. 52,22,378, Rs. 1,41,61,305, and Rs. 2,64,20,189, respectively. Leaving aside for the moment the last two decades (1910-11 to 1920-21) as falling in the period of the First World War and after. It is to be noted that the value of rice imported per year rose, in the course of 37 years (1874-75 to 1910-11), from Rs. 12, 11, 611, to Rs. 52, 22, 378, i. e., more than a four-fold increase.

Just as in the case of rice, so in the case of other consumption goods, imports have grown tremendously. According to the same publication, 37.5 per cent of imports into Travancore in the year 1113 Malayalam Era (A. D. 1937-38) consisted of foodgrains. The import of cloth, kerosene and tobacco accoun-

ted for 11 per cent, 7 per cent and 3.7 per cent respectively, adding up to 59.2 per cent for the most essential consumption goods. (It is, of course, true that these import figures include imports from other parts of India but that does not affect the generalization made here, since this qualification would apply to total imports also. Besides, the major part of foodgrains imported consisted of Burma and Siam rice.)

Along with this increase in the import of rice and other essential consumption goods, there has also taken place an increase in the exports of certain commodities, For example :

The export of coffee in 1029 Malayalam Era (A. D. 1853-54) was to the value of Rs. 6, 553. It grew to Rs. 37, 370 in the next 8 Years and to Rs. 1, 87, 875 in the next 76 Years.

—There was no export of rubber, tea or cardamom in 1029 Malayalam Era (A.D. 1853-54). But by the year 1113 (1937-38), these commodities were exported to the value of Rs.74,89,464, 2,25,61,823 and Rs. 33,01,502 respectively.

—The export af coconut oil rose from Rs.1,27,395 in 1853-4 to Rs. 1,34,649 in 1861-62 and to Rs. 59,51,499 in 1937-38. Similarly, the export of coir rose from Rs. 92,427 to Rs.5,93,926 and Rs. 1,64,10,624 in the same period.

Furthermore, just as 59.2 per cent of the imports into Travancore in 937-38 consisted of essential consumption goods, so did 65.1 per cent of that year's exports consist of raw materials or semi-manufactured goods made out of the cash crops produced in Kerala. (Exact figures are: tea- 23.9 per cent; rubber - 8 per cent; other plantation products - 4.5 per cent; coir - 17.4 per cent; coconut oil - 6.3 per cent; copra and other coconut produce - 5.8 per cent. Thus, plantations account for 36.4 per cent of Travancore's exports, while a further 29.5 per cent consists of coconut produce.)

Such increases in the exports of these commodities have been based on tremendous changes in the pattern of agriculture—increase in acreage under, and in the volume of production of cash crops.

The rapidity with which the cultivation of certain cash crops increased can be seen from the figures given in the *Travancore State Manual*:

> According to official estimates, the area under coconut cultivation in 1934-35 was 5,66,590 acres which was about 50 per cent higher than what it was 16 years previously. This is rather an under-estimate. (Vol. III, Pp. 352).

> The first clearing for coffee in Travancore was made by Dr. D. Munro in the Hope Estate in 1862. (Ibid, p. 370)

> Tea is a very important plantation crop in Travancore. Although the tea bush has been cultivated for over a century in Northern India, it is only within comparatively recent times that it has been introduced into Southern India. It is difficult to say where tea was first planted in South India. But, if Travancore can not actually claim this distinction for certain, at all events it was flourishing in this state within a very few years of its first introduction to the south. (Ibid, p. 372)

The *State Manual* also points out that, while the acreage under paddy in 1936-37 was 6,63,184, coconut was a close second with its 5,77,418 acres. The three plantation crops of rubber (97,125 acres), tea (77,726 acres) and coffee (6,279 acres) together constitute more than a quarter of the acreage under paddy. The acreage under coconut, sugarcane, rubber, tea, coffee, pepper and ginger together is 8,16,335 which is 123 per cent of the acreage under paddy (6,63,184).

There is one crop which is partly a food and partly an industrial crop—tapioca. Part of it is used as food (it is part of the staple diet of the poor people and is eaten in place of vegetables even by the upper classes; its use as food increased enormously during wars and famines); while a part of it is made into starch and exported to Bombay and other centres for industrial use. Even if the whole of this is considered as used for food, acreage under food crops (paddy and tapioca together) will be only 10,86,876, i. e., 2,70,541 more than the major cash crops.

Similarly, in Malbar, the total acreage under paddy in the year 1937-38 was 8,64,825. The three cash crops of coconut, arecanut and pepper together came to 5,32,787 acres, i. e., nearly two-thirds of the acreage under paddy. If to this is added the acreage under other cash crops as well as the big plantations (tea, coffee, oranges, etc.,) in Wynad (which are as large and extensive as the plantations in Travancore), the total acreage under cash crops in Malabar will come to nearly 50 per cent of the total land under cultivation. (Figures for Malabar are taken from the 1940 *Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee*

It is thus clear that agriculture in Kerala is directed towards the production of cash crops to be sold in the world market and that only the barest minimum of goods are produoed for the purpose of local consumption. Every peasant is today dependent on the condition of the world market in a two-fold way : he has to buy commodities produced abroad: he has to sell his own produce abroad.

III

The substitution of natural by commodity economy also meant the growth of certain strata of society which were either totally absent or very insignificant in the old days.

Writing in 1820, Ward and Conner said in their *Memoir of the Snrvey of the Travancore and Cochin States* : 'Subsistence is almost entirely derived from agricultural labour, nor do the temptations of commerce attract even the wealthier classes from rural pursuits which are most esteemed, the handicraft professions being abandoned to the lower ranks.'

Today, however, there is a large section of the people whose main source of livelihood is trade, transport, etc. For instance, the 1931 Economic Census of Travancore shows that while the biggest section of 'persons following different occupations' among the earners was 'agricultural labour'; the next biggest section was 'trade' (2, 63, 385 and 1, 20, 293). It also shows that, ≷ hile those employed in the production of primary commodities (i.e., agricultural labour, estate 'coolies', unskilled labourers, persons employed in the expliotation of minerals and

fishermen) added up to a total of 4,28,321, those who take up tertiary occupations (i.e., transport, trade, fish trade, public administration, professions and liberal arts) came to a total of 2,41,935. This was 40,276 more than those engaged in secondary occupations (industries) which was only 2,01,659. Trade, transport, professions and arts have thus become a far bigger force today than they were over a century ago.

A change has also taken place in the very character of agricultural labour and handicrafts : the semi-serf agricultural laboures in pre-British days were tied to particular plots of land and their masters. Each of the handicraftsmen was also tied to a particular village where he had to work and whose inhabitants had to feed him. The British, changed this and brought about, although to a limited extent, production relations based on wage-labour and capital.

It has already been shown how the cultivation of food crops has been and is being replaced by the cultivation of cash crops. This has naturally led to the growth of capitalist farms.

The most developed form of these capitalist farms is the plantation—tea, rubber, coffee, cardamom, lemon-grass, etc. According to the Travancore Depression Enquiry Committee, the acreage under rubber was 61,986, tea 74,618, cardamom, 30,000 and lemon-grass 12,000 acres—a total of 178,604 acres. This out of a total cultivated area of 21, 97,000 acres works out to 1/12 of the total. Moreover, the total paid-up capital of plantations working in Travancore was, according to the Administration Report, over Rs. 10 crores.

Such figures could not be collected for Cochin or Malabar but more or less the same picture obtains there also. In fact, one whole district (out of twelve) in Malabar (Wynad) is full of plantations.

There is another type of cultivation which also involves large-scale employment of wage-labour and capital. This is called *kol* and *kayal*. The peculiarity of this is that it requires the employ-

ment of large amounts of labour and capital for draining the land of water. (This was done in the old days through hundreds of wheels worked by human labour. This method has now been replaced by the use of diesel engines.) The area under this mode of cultivation in Cochin is, according to the Cochin Agrarian Reforms Committee, 18,761 acres. This is nine per cent of the total land under paddy (2,06,000 acres). As for Travancore, the Kuttanad area (the most extensive area under *kayal* cultivation in Travancore) alone comes to 1,67,176 acres —nearly 25 per cent of the total land under paddy (7,01,306 acres) and 7.5 per cent of the total acreage under cultivation (21,97,000 acres).

Wage-labour-capital relations are, however, not confined to plantations or *kol-kayal* cultivation alone. A major portion of coconut farms on the coastal areas is under the direct possession of the owner who employs labourers during the seasons in which some work is to be carried out. Similarly, a good portion of land under such cash crops as tapioca, bananas, etc.; is also cultivated through wage-labour.

Apart from these areas of land under capitalist cultivation, there are a large number of rural industries where capitalist relations have developed. The most widespread of these is coir-making. Tens of thousands of people, mainly women, are employed in soaking the outer husk of the coconut (not the shell) in water, taking the fibre out and spinning it into yarn. These people are employed by some capitalists who buy the coconut, employ labour and make profits out of the business. Similarly, there are other industries like drying the coconut kernel so as to transform it into copra, fishing, rowing of boats (couutry-craft), etc. It is out of these rural industries that the comparatively modern industries like the coir factories, oil mills, fisheries, motor and steam boats, etc., have developed. For every urban factory in these industries, there are thousands of men, women and children employed in the village to carry out the earlier processes.

For example, in six out of the eight villages surveyed in Cochin in 1936 (I could not get the report of the other villages),

the percentage of agricultural labour to total families was 39.1, 38.7, 59.3, 64.4, 54.7 and 72.9 respectively. Again, as per the 1931 Census, the percentage of agricultural labourers to the total population who depended on land as their means of livelihood was 42.9, 61 and 37.9 respectively in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. These census figures, however, exclude several categories of rural wage-labourers like fishermen, boatmen, plantation labourers, those employed in rural industrises, etc. There is no doubt that if all these are added to the figures of those who are strictly called agricultural labourers, the percentage of wage-labourers to total population will be far higher.

Another indication of this tendency is the growth of joint stock companies regarding which the *Travancore State Manual* says :

> A large portion of the trade of the country is run by commercial corporations registered under Company Law. The necessity for legalising the incorporation, regulation and winding up of trading companies and other associations arose in Travancore in 1063 Malayalam Era (A.D. 1887-8). The immediate necessity arose out of the formation of a joint stock company to set up a paper mill at Punalur to utilize a great deal of raw material which was being wasted incidentally, it was thought necessary to encourage the combination of capital and skill in industrial and other undertakings which were too much for the individual. Regulation I of 1063 was, therefore, passed to enable the promotion of joint stock enterprise. The Regulation merely enacted that the Indian companies Act of 1882, as amended by Act VI of 1887, shall *mutatis mutandis* come into force in Travancore. The above regulation was repealed by the existing Regulation of 1092 M.E. (1916-7) as the provisions of the earlier Regulation were found insufficient to meet the present requirements. This was followed by boom in company formations...
>
> (Vol. III, p.666)

The statistics given in the *State Manual* show that, in the ten-year period 1102-1111 M. E. (A. D. 1926-7 to 1935-6). the

total number of joint stock companies in operation rose from 152 to 390, while their paid-up capital rose from Rs. 81,81, 34 to Rs. 1, 87, 58, 898. It should be noted that this increase is more than double the number and paid-up capital of joint stock companies was taking place at a time which includes the entire period of the world economic crisis of 1929-32.

It was in this period, too, that the Indian business community in Travancore was organizing itself : the Alleppey Chamber of Commerce was started in 1929, the South Travancore Chamber of Commerce in 1935 and the Trivandrum Chamber at about the same time. These three Chambers of Commerce represent the Indian business community in three main areas of Travancore, as distinct from the Travancore Chamber of Commerce which, though formally open to both European and Indian businessmen, is really dominated by the Europeans.

Kerala was thus developing its own bourgeoisie; but developing in the conditions of a colonial economy, i. e., in the conditions under which 'real industrialization of the colonial country,in particular the building up of a flourishing engineering industry,which might make possible the independent development of the productive forces of the country, is not accelerated but, on the contrary, is hindered by the metropolis' (Communist International, *Colonial Thesis* ,p. 15). Only seven per cent of those who are counted as being engaged in industries--24, 511, out of 3,51,076 – are factory workers in Travancore, the rest being engaged in cottage industries. (*State Manual*, Vol. III, p. 42)

It is also to be noted that, out of the 390 joint stock Companies registered in Travancore and functioning in 1111 M. E. (A. D. 1935-36), 244 come under the category of banking and loan, 26 under insurance and one under *nidhis* and chit associations – a total of 271 engaged in money lending and other financial transactions. Seven others are engaged in transit and transport and five in trading, while 38 are engaged in plantation work, thus leaving only 69 companies which may have anything to do with manufacture proper. Even out of these, 13 relate to 'printing, publishing and stationery'; three are classified

as 'miscellaneous', leaving 53 companies engaged in industrial production proper. One out of these 53 is a cotton mill, another is a paper mill, a third is a rice mill, a fourth is an oil mill and a fifth is a sugar company. 38 out of the remaihing come under the category of 'other trading and manufacturing'—which, as the term implies has very little to do with manufacture—leaving only 10 (engineering 4, public service 1, building materials 5). (*State Manual*, Vol. III, p. 667)

The statistics of joint stock companies given in the Administration Report for the year 1119 M. E. (A. D. 1943-44) show that, out of the 436 companies registered in Travancore with a total paid-up capital of Rs 502 lakhs, 138 companies with a total paid-up capital of 63 lakhs are engaged in money-lending, 18 companies with Rs. 7 lakhs in transport, 89 companies with Rs. 282 lakhs in plantations. This means that 56.1 per cent of the companies with 70.1 per cent of the paid-up capital are engaged in lines of production that have nothing to do with manufacturing industries. The remaining 30 per cent of the paid-up capital of joint stock companies is devoted to all those trading and manufacturing operations that are being carried on. It is thus clear that only a very small percentage of the total capital of joint stock companies is used for industrial production.

Another aspect of a colonial economy is also evident from the Administration Report : a major part of the country's economy was controlled by foreigners, mainly the British. For example, there were 21 plantation companies registered outside India and functioning in Travancore, the the total paid-up capital of which was Rs. 7, 70, 22, 558, while there were 89 companies registered in Travancore with a paid-up capital of Rs. 2, 82, 00, 000. 73.3 per cent of the total paid-up capital of plantation companies was thus foreign, mainly British. Similarly, according to the Depression Committee, out of a total area of land under plantation crops of 1, 84, 604, acres, 31,000 acres alone were held by local planters, thus leaving 5/6 of the total plantation acreage under the British. British capitallists also controlled 60 per cent of the coir industry in Travancore. It will not be an exaggeration to say that a few British firms like Pierce Leslie & Co., Harrison & Crossfields, Kannan

Devan, Commonwealth Trust, etc., and the Swiss Volkart Brothers dominated the plantation and such other industries as had developed in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar.

IV

This colonial character of the economy as a whole—the very low development of industries proper as well as the domination of British capital in all fields of activity that can be called capitalistic— left the indigenous bourgeoisie no other field for the investment of capital than land. All those who were able to make savings were forced to invest them in loans to peasants or landlords, in the acquisition of rights on land mortgages or even in purchasing land. This, in its turn, led to a gigantic transformation in the character of landed property itself, i. e., it became a commodity that can be bought and sold like any other commodity.

According to the *Travancore State Manual*, the total value of cultivated land in Travancore (21,97,000 acres) was Rs.140,99 lakhs. At the same time, land transfers took place as given in Table I.

TABLE I

(in Rs. lakhs)

Period	*Value of land sold*	*Value of land mortgaged*	*Value of land hypothecated*	*Total*
1917-18 to 1919-20	193	144	218	555
1920-21 to 1924-25	221	164	234	619
1925-26 to 1930-31	303	153	298	754
1931-32 to 1933-34	172	103	192	467
	889	564	942	2,395

This means that, for the 16-year period as a whole, land transfers per year averaged about Rs. 149.9 lakhs. In other words, more than one per cent of the total cultivated land (whose value as stated above is Rs. 140,99 lakhs) was changing hands every year.

Similarly in Cochin (whose total cultivated land was 5,09,564 acres), sale of land alone (i. e., excluding mortgages and hypothecations) was valued at an average of 7,351 acres valued at Rs. 35.4 lakhs per year in the war years of 1942-46. (Sivaswamy Committee Report)

It is also remarkable that the argument advanced in the majority report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee in 1940 against reducing the rate of rent from 2/3 to 1/2 was that such a reduction would not enable the landlord to get a reasonable return on his investment at the prevailing rate in the land market.

All this shows that the sale and purchase of land has become as regular a process as the sale and purchase of any other commodity.

It also led to the imposition of a new burden on the peasantry—the burden of indebtedness. According to the figures collected for the Banking Committee of 1951 the total agrarian indebtedness of Travancore was Rs. 20 to 25 crores. This would mean that a minimum of Rs. 3 crores (being calculated at 15 per cent on Rs. 20 crores) goes every year to the money-lender as interest: this out of a total value of agricultural produce of Rs. 10.5 crores works out to 1/3 of the gross agricultural produce. In reality, however, it is far more; the rate of 15 per cent of interest is an under-estimate.

No such figures are available for either Cochin or Malabar. But it was calculated in one of the Minutes of Dissent to the 1940 Malabar Tenancy Committee's Report that the agrarian indebtedness of Malabar would be about Rs. 15 crores. Interest on this at 15 per cent will amount to Rs. 2.25 crores. This works out to more than 25 per cent of the value of a year's agricultural produce (Rs. 7 crores).

The 1936 survey into the conditions of some villages in Cochin showed that the total value of land in seven villages (at market rates) was Rs. 40,59,704, while the debts secured on those lands alone (i.e., excluding amounts borrowed by peasants

on documents with no security on lands) came to Rs.8,00,903. In other words, 20 per cent of the total value of land in these villages is the liability of these lands to the money-lender.

All these figures lead us to a reasonable assumption that no less than 30 per cent of a year's agricultural produce is the tribute levied by the usurer on the land. Part of it may be drawn from the share which the landlord collects by way of rent and may not, therefore, be a direct burden on the cultivator, but part is certainly an additional burden (over and above the landlord's rent) on the peasant. It is significant that, in Travancore where the share of the landlord is comparatively less, almost five times the amount collected by the landlord is collected by the money-lender (rent is Rs. 117 lakhs, interest is over Rs. 3 crores.)

V

An extremely significant development that took place in the period of British rule was the transformation of the *jenmis* from a real ruling class to a class of rent-receiver-parasites in every sense of the term.

We saw in an earlier chapter that the *jenmis* of pre-British days were an organic part of the then-prevailing socio-political set-up. The state machinery of those days was based on the social order whose foundation lay in the ownership, as proprietor, of certain patches of land—each of the Rajas, Desavazhis, Naduvazhis, etc., having his own lands, a fixed proportion of the produce of which was paid as his share. It was because of this system of payment in kind in the form of a share of the agricultural produce that Kerala, up to the period of Tipu Sultan, had not heard of the custom of the government levying land revenue.

A peculiarity of this system was that nobody was a proprietor of land in the modern sense of the term, i. e., nobody could do as he pleased with the land. There was a regular code of relations as between the *jenmi*, the *kanamdar*, the *verumpattamdar*, etc. This code did, of course, give very wide powers to the *jenmis* who coud interfere with the personal and domestic

affairs of all his tenants. The *jenmi*, however, had no right to evict any of his tenants, so long as they paid up the *jenmi's* share of the produce and otherwise obeyed him. Nor would any *jenmi* dream of increasing the rent due to him, as enhancement of rent would not be countenanced by society. Hence, while the tenants were very much under the feudal domination of the *jenmi*, the economic exploitation to which they were subjected was limited.

To this system the British rulers dealt a heavy blow. In the name of restoring order in the land, they did two things:

1. They made the land revenue, first imposed by Tipu Sultan, a permanent institution, every square inch of land being subjected to it. How heavy this burden is can be seen from the fact that while the rate of land revenue in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore varied till recently from Rs. 1 or so to Rs. 9 per acre, the average rate of rent collected by zamindars in permanently settled Bengal was only Rs. 3-8 and that in U. P. Rs. 5-8. The government's revenue demands here are, in other words, as heavy as, if not more than those of the zamindar's rent.

2. They so interpreted the system of landlord-tenant relations in Kerala that, in the brief period of a couple of decades, the *jenmis* were transformed into absolute masters of the land. The customary limitations put on the *jenmi* were disregarded and he was permitted to evict his tenants as well as enhance his rents as and when he pleased. Efforts were, of course, subsequently made to partially retrieve the situation by means of tenancy legislations, but these did not arrest the process of pauperization of the peasants. For, whatever was achieved through these tenancy legislations benefited only a small stratum of well-to-do (very often non-cultivating) tenants, thus leaving the large mass of cultivating tenants and subtenants unprotected.

According to the figures collected by the Malabar Tenancy Committee (1940), 90 per cent of the total cultivated land was owned by non-cultivators and leased out to cultivators. Relying on the figures collected by the Committee and calculating on

the basis of rates fixed under the provisions of the Tenancy Act in force, the author of this book, who was a member of the Committee showed in his Minute of Dissent that out of a total of Rs. 700 lakhs worth a year's agricultural produce, Rs. 250 lakhs went to the landlords and Rs. 50 lakhs to the government. Slightly less then 50 per cent of the total produce was thus taken out of the hands of the peasants It should, however, be borne in mind that this calculation was made on the basis of rates fixed in the Tenancy Act which are less than the real rates prevailing at the time. This figure, should, therefore, be considered an under-estimate, rather than an over-estimate.

For Cochin as a whole, there are no such figures. But the officer who conducted an Economic Survey of some typical villages in 1936 recorded in every case that, after meeting the cultivation expenses and paying the rent to the landlord, the tenant cultivator gets absolutely nothing; in many cases he may even run into debt. This was also the conclusion arrived at by the offiicer who investigated on behalf of the Cochin Agrarian Committee of 1948. He said that the proportion of rent fixed generally ranged from one half to threefourths of the yield, while the cost of cultivation was about 50 per cent. To the question as to how 50 to 75 per cent of the yield can be collected as rent if the cost of cultivation itself is 50 per cent, this offiicer answered : 50 percent as cost of cultivation includes all the items that are part of a scientfiically calculated cost of cultivation (such as seed, manure, wages for hired as well as family labour, fodder for the whole year, interest on and depreciation of capital invested in cattle and implement, etc.); while the ordinary peasant includes only seed, wages for hired labour and fodder for the period of agricultural operations. Rent is thus "not only a deduction from the profit but also from elements required for the reproduction of capital". (Marx)

The real position, however, is far worse as is shown by the figures collected by the Cochin Kisan Sabha for one village.

Figures were also collected from two more villages by the Kisan Sabha and submitted to the Agrarian Committee of 1948.

TABLE II

No	*Gross Produce paras of paddy*	*Rent paras of paddy*	*Percentage of rent to gross produce*	*Indebtedness*
1.	100	90	90	500
2.	250	213	85	200
3.	120	100	86	300
4.	180	168	90	300
5.	350	240	70	3000
6.	400	308	75	4 0
7.	400	357	80	.....
8.	200	148	75	300
9.	240	155	65	435
10.	420	281	62	.....
11.	80	56	70	1000
12.	40	28	70	2500
13.	160	150	94	400
14.	240	192	80	125
15.	100	60	60	200
16.	75	54	70	250
17.	720	428	60	.....
18.	50	32	67	.....
19.	90	60	67	125
20.	88	69	80	300
21.	130	105	90	.....
22.	108	96	90	500
23.	75	66	90	35
24.	64	54	84	200

Figures were also collected from two more villages by the Kisan Sabha and submitted to the Agrarian Committee of 1948.

So far as Travancore is concerned, the non-cultivating, rent-receiving landlords collect 11.7 per cent of the total agricultural produce as rent. For, according to the 1931 Economic Census, the total value of a year's agricultural produce is Rs, 10,50 lakhs, out of which Rs. 117 lakhs goes as rent to landlords. It is also remarkable that, while this Rs. 117 lakhs is appropriated by 17.99 per cent landlords, Rs. 161 lakhs goes to 223,689 agricultural labourers as wages and Rs. 713 lakhs to 355, 635 owner-cultivators and cultivating tenants. The respective share per capita of landlords' rent, labourers' wages and cultivators' income are thus Rs. 650, Rs. 70 and Rs. 202.

While, therefore, the British system of administration made the old mititarist-feudal political order defunct and superfluous; while the functions of the Rajas, the Naduvazhis, the Desavazhis, etc., were entirely taken over by British civilians, the shares of the produce, which these incumbents to adminstrative offices

were receiving in return for the services rendered by them, were greatly increased. They thus became real parasites in the full sense of the term. However, they were parasite only in relation to the people of Kerala and not in relation to the British rulers to whom they rendered 'distinguished service'. For, it was through these loyal supporters of their rule that the British were able to squeeze the last pie out of the peasants; it was through this continuous exploitation of the peasantry that they could be forced to produce such raw materials as imperialism required; it was through this exploitation and the subsequent pauperization of the rural population that imperialism could get cheap labour for its plantations and mines in all parts of the world as well as cannon-fodder in times of war. The proud successors of the Cheras and the Perumals had become loyal, obedient agents of an alien rule whose existence was the only reason for their own survival.

All these transformations in the socio-economic order have led to a steady and continuous pauperization of our people. The 150 years of British rule were years in which, first the poor peasant, then the middle peasant, finally sections of the rich peasant and landlords too lost their proprietary rights on the land and had to leave their villages in search of jobs to all parts of India, as well as to such foreign lands as Burma, Malaya, Ceylon, etc. A good chunk of the Indian labourers in Ceylon, Burma and Malaya are drawn from among the Malayalees; so do a good chunk of the Malayalee middle class go out as clerks all over India; the industrial proletariat of Coimbatore, Madras, Bombay, etc., also contain their own quota of Malayalees. It will not be an exaggeration to say that for every 12 Malayalees living in Kerala, one is an emigrant in various parts of India and the rest of the world.

While this process was originally confined to the peasant and other toiling classes, the years of the First World War brought into it several families of old feudal landlords also. The inflation due to the First World War and the immediate post-war years put a tremendous amount of money in the hands of the big landlords who used it for lending to medium and small landlords, or for buying their lands outright. Since, however, there was not sufficient money in their hands to buy all that was

available, many landlords borrowed a good portion of their requirements at rates of interest paid in those days of high prices of agricultural commodities. The crash of 1929 shattered all their hopes of making a profit on borrowed capital; not only did the land, bought with borrowed capital, fail to yield any profits but interest on borrowed capital beagan to eat up the rent on lands traditionally owned by them and passed from generation to generation. The process of family budgets getting unbalanced; depending on the usurer not only to pay off past debts but to meet current expenses as well; mortgaging of land; being forced to sell land; getting insolvent, etc., started in the case of big feudal landlords also. The result is that today in the ranks of the emigrant Malayalees seeking jobs outside can be found members of the old feudal landlord families.

Out of this pauperization of the people, i. e., the pauperization of the entire peasantry as well as a section of the landlords, has arisen a class of landlords of a new type—the type that does not base itself on the right of 'ancient *jenmam*', since they are not in continuous possession of *jenmam* right on their lands, as the landlords of the old type were. They, on the other hand, lay their claim to their lands on the fact that they paid cash to get these rights This being so, they are also far more stringent than the landlords of the old type in the matter of squeezing rent from their tenants : they would not be satisfied, as the old type of landlords used to be, with nominal rents combined with social subservience, but would insist on the last pie being paid to them. Many of the old-type landlord families have themselves become new-type landlords by buying additional lands and managing them as property on which, having invested their cash they insist on as big a return as possible. It is in this way that while the entire peasantry and sections of the old landlords have become pauperized, a section of the old landlords as well as sections of the newly-rich people have become landlords who have a monopoly of possession of land.

This polarization between the pauperized majority and the extremely rich minority can be seen in the figures of families (percentages in the total number of families) according to annual family net income in seven typical villages of Cochin, collected by the Economic Survey officer in 1936 (See Table III).

TABLE III

Village	*Below Rs. 251*	*Rs. 26 to Rs. 50*	*Rs. 51 to Rs. 100*	*Rs. 101 to Rs. 200*	*Rs. 201 to Rs. 500*	*Rs. 501 to Rs. 1000*	*Rs. 1001 to Rs. 200*	*Above Rs. 2000*
Anthikkad	3.8	9.0	35.5	33.3	10.5	1.5	1.1	0.5
Chundal	1.6	9.3	33.9	38.9	12.4	1.2	0.8	3.0
Eruttempadi	2.0	7.3	30.2	39.5	12.7	2.6	0.8	0.6
Pattancheri	0.9	1.6	37.2	41.8	10.8	1.7	0.3	00.1
Venganallur	1.1	10.4	38.7	35.5	11.5	2.0	0.2	.....
Vallivattam	1.7	5.9	31.3	46.7	9.8	0.3	0.1	.....
Thiruvazhiyad	1.0	7.0	35.6	44.2	9.0	1.2	0.4	.....

Note ; Difference in all cases between 100 and the total of above figures is accounted for by families with 'minus net income'.

This shows that :

1. Between 38.9 per cent (in Vallivattam) and 50.2 per cent (Venganallur) of families fall in the category of those below Rs. 100 per year per family, or less than Rs. 20 per head per year, or less than one anna per head per day.

2. Between 79 per cent (Eruttempadi) and 87.6 per cent (Thiruvazhiyad) of families fall in the category of those below Rs. 200 per family per year, or less than Rs. 40 per head per year, or less than two annas per head per day.

3. Only a microscopic minority of between 0.4 per cent (Vallivattam) and 3.1 per cent (Anthikkad) falls in the category of those with Rs. 500 and above per family per year, or Rs. 100 and above per head per year, or above 4½ annas per head per day.

Table IV gives the classification of the 100,059 families surveyed in Travancore in 1941 according to annual net income per family. (These figures include not only rural areas but also urban areas. It is clear that, if the figures relating to urban areas are deducted, poverty will be shown to be more intense than is seen here.)

TABLE IV

Income group	*No. of families*	*Percentage*
Below Rs. 60 per year	20,199	20.2
Between Rs. 61 and Rs. 120	38,992	39.0
Between Rs. 121 and Rs. 180	18,075	18.0
Between Rs. 181 and Rs. 300	12,886	12.9
Between Rs. 301 and Rs. 480	5,254	5.3
Between Rs. 481 and Rs. 840	2,695	2.7
Between Rs. 841 and Rs. 1200	787	0.8
Between Rs. 1201 and Rs. 1800	558	0.6
Between Rs. 1801 and Rs. 2400	251	0.3
Between Rs. 2401 and Rs. 3600	183	0.2
Between Rs. 3601 and Rs. 4800	66	0 2
Between Rs. 4801 and Rs. 6000	40	
Between Rs. 6001 and Rs. 8400	23	
Above Rs. 8400	52	

Thus :

1. 59.2 per cent of families have less than Rs. 120 per year.

2. 77.2 per cent have less than Rs. 180 per year.

3. 90.1 per cent have less than Rs. 300 per year.

4. Only a small minority of 4.6 per cent have annual incomes of above Rs. 480 per year.

So much with regard to the annual income of families. Now, let us look at it from another angle—the angle of landholdings.

The 100,059 families in Travancore mentioned above can be classified as in Table V, according to the area of land they own:

TABLE V

Category	*Number*	*Percentage*
No land	40,795	40.8
Below Rs. 500 worth about ½acre of land	36,969	37.0
Rs. 500-1,00 worth ½ to 1 acre of land	8,985	9.0
Rs. 1000-4,000 worth 1 to 4 acres of land	9,601	9.6
Above Rs. 4,000 worth 4 acres of land	3,709	3.7
	1,00,059	

Thus :

1. Those with absolutely no land or very little (less than one acre) land constitute 86.8 per cent of the total.

2. Those who have land above 4 acres constitute only 3.7 per cent.

It should also be noted that :

1. Families with less than Rs. 60 as annual income and less than Rs, 500 worth (½ acre) of land are 20,199 (20.2 per cent).

2. Those with less than Rs. 120 annual income and less than Rs. 500 worth ($\frac{1}{2}$ acre) of land are 55,012 (55.0 per cent).

3. Those with less than Rs. 300 annual income and less than Rs. 1000 worth (1 acre) of land are 83,259 (83.3 per cent).

4. Those with annual income of above Rs. 300 and land worth above Rs. 4,000 (4 acres) are only 3,211 (3.2 per cent).

As regards Cochin, classification of peasants and their percentages in the seven villages mentioned above is as in Table VI.

TABLE VI

Village	*Below 25 cents*	*26—50 cents*	*51 cents to 1 acre*	*1 to 5 acres*	*Above 5 acres*
Anthikkad	12.5	12.5	17.7	39.1	18.2
Chundal	20.2	14.4	13.7	32.8	18.9
Eruttempadi	27.8	4.0	2.9	8.1	57.2
Pattancheri	7.9	7 9	17.1	26.3	40.8
Venganallur	21.5	20.5	18.1	22.0	18.1
Vallivattam	10.5	16.5	20.2	41.4	11.4
Thiruvazhiyad	42.1	3.5	7.0	15.8	31.6

These figures of classification of peasants will be incomplete if we forget the figures of percentages of landowning (both landlord and tenant) families to total number of families which, in the seven villages, are respectively, 43.1, 54.4, 30.2, 17.2, 40.3, 43.5, and 16.6. Combining the two sets of figures, we find that :

1. 39.1 per cent, 38.7 per cent, 59.3 per cent, 64.4 per cent, 54.7 per cent and 41.7 per cent and 72.9 per cent of families belong to the category of absolutely landless peasants.

2. Again, out of every 100 families in the above villages, those who have less than over acre constitute 18.5 per cent, 25.9 per cent, 10.5 per cent, 5.6 per cent, 24.0 per cent, 20.7 per cent and 8.3 per cent respectively.

3. Moreover, those with land between one acre and five

acres constitute 16.8 per cent, 17.3 per cent, 2.4 per cent, 4.4 per cent, 8.8 per cent, 17.6 per cent and 2.4 per cent respectively.

4. Those with land above five acres constitute only 7.7 per cent, 9.7 per cent, 17.1 per cent, 7 per cent, 7.2 per cent, 4.8 per cent and 5.3 per cent respectively.

It is thus clear that, whether you take annual net income per family or the land they own, as the criterion of classification, 60 to 80 per cent of the rural population in Cochin and Travancore is proletarian and semi-proletarian. This is the result of the combined exploitation of imperialism, feudal and semi-feudal landlordism and usury.

As against this, proletarian and semi-proletarian majority is the small minority of big landlords and other upper class exploiters.

According to the 1941 Economic Survey of Travancore, while, 20,199 families out of 100,959 have annual incomes below Rs. 60 and another 38,992 have incomes between Rs. 60 and Rs. 120 (these together may certainly be considered as proletarian), only a very small minority of 1,173 families (1.17 per cent) have income above Rs. 1200 a year. These 1173 families are classified as follows as per their occupation or means of livelihood.

1. Landlords: 325 (27.7 percent of this income group; 0.325 per cent of total population);

2. Trade and industry (including banking): 301 (25.7 per cent of this income group; 0.301 per cent of the total population);

3. Government service and professions: 520 (44.3 per cent of this income group; 0.52 per cent of total population);

4. Others : 27 (2.5 per cent of this income group; 0.027 per cent of total population).

It is on this thin top stratum of exploiters that the British

rulers relied to carry on their rule. It is from their ranks that high government officials as well as the non-official "professional" classes were drawn. It is with their assistance, as we will see in subsequent chapters, that the British rulers crushed, disrupted or sabotaged the democratic movement of the common people. For, although it was itself the victim of imperialistic oppression and exploitation, this top stratum of exploiters was too hostile to the interests of the common people to identify itself with the anti-imperialist movement of the entire people. Like the Rajahs, Naduvazhis, Desavazhis, etc., of the eighteenth century, their successors of the twentieth century - the present-day *jenmis*, traders, industrial and professional classes—would far rather yield to the blandishments of their imperialist oppressors than unite with the common people to overthrow imperialist domination.

6

Peasants In Anti-Imperialist Action

'We thought', said Dalava (Minister) Velu Thampi, the leader of the anti-British revolt in Travancore, in his famous Kundara Proclamation of 1809, 'that the (English East India) Company is composed of people of integrity and loyalty to allies and that they would not cheat us. We, therefore, permitted them to erect a fort at Anjengo and settle themselves there. Believing in their loyalty and friendship we fought Tipu Sultan and made alliance with them. Subsequently, however, it was proved that friendship with them was a source of danger to us.'

Recounting how the demands of the company on the state of Travancore rose from time to time and how the Company sent its troops to enforce these demands, Velu Thampi concluded :

> If resistance is not offered at this stage to what they are attempting to do, our people will be put to such sufferings as cannot be borne by human beings. If they are allowed to use their traditional methods of trickery to bring our country into their hands,they will put sentries over,and control,every place including the palace; stop all the traditional honour to our ruler as well as the traditional usages of temples and Brahmin houses; bring every article including salt into their monopoly; measure every plot of land and every house-site and levy excessive land tax, coconut tax, etc; inflict barbarous punishments for slight offences; put the Christian Cross and their flag on temples; violate the chastity of Brahmin ladies; and introduce all other customs that are contrary to our religion. In order that such misfortunes may not occur in our country, that the royal Dharma may be preserved, that our country's

traditional way of life is saved from destruction, we should do all that is humanly possible and leave the rest to the will of God. Thus have we started our resistance to the Company.

The author of the *Travancore State Manual* says regarding this proclamation :

> Velu Thampi stated his case in such forcible language that the whole country seethed with the spirit of uncompromising hostitity towards those who were described as enemies to the country...The country rose as one man to its battles to the utmost of its resources. Armed men came in thousands upon thousands to join Velu Thampi's. standard The Travancore army consisted of more than 30,000 men with 18 guns.

Velu Thampi, however, was not alone in this. The issue on which he raised the standard of revolt was such that the entire people of Travancore, including the ruling classes were behind him; those of them who hesitated to join did so only because they were afraid that the British were too powerful for any revolt to succeed. Furthermore,

> The affairs of Cochin favoured a combination of the two states against Col.Macaulay. The Raja of Cochin was a weak prince who was content to live a quiet life at Vellarapalli while he allowed the minister Paliyath Achan to administer the state as he liked. Both states presented the same spectacle in their administrations...Both ministers (Velu Thampi and Paliyath Achan)who were already united in private friendship with each other were stirred by a common motive against Macaulay who, they believed, was not only their personal foe but also a dangerous enemy to both countries. *(Travancore State Manual)*.

Thus was begun the first national revolt against the British—a revolt which, in all essentials, resembled the subseqent and far bigger revolt in another part of the country, the famous 'Sepoy Mutiny' of 1857. Persistent efforts have been made by British historians to paint Velu Thampi as a traitor and intriguer; efforts have also been made by Indian authors to paint the picture of an honest and patriotic man who tried to be

friendly, but who was ultimately forced to clash with the British rulers because of the particularly offensive tactics of the then British Resident, Col. Macaulay. Actually, however, Velu Thampi and to a lesser extent, Paliyath Achan represented the feudal ruling classes of the country who were incensed at the humiliation they had to suffer at the hands of the alien rulers and hence decided to offer a last-ditch battle

It is this same resistance of the feudal ruling classes to British rule that we find in the struggle which the Raja of Pazhassi in North Malabar offered in the jungly regions of present-day Kottayam and Wynad taluks. The prolonged engagements in which the world-renowned Duke of Wellington was bogged down against the Raja of Pazhassi and his Kurichiars is one of the most colourful stories of heroism in our country's annals.

It is true that these representatives of our ruling classes, as their counterparts of North India in 1857, were originally loyal to the British rulers; it was through the loyal assistance rendered by them that the British strengthened themselves. But, once they found in real life that, in return for their services, the British made them absolutely subservient, their sense of honour asserted itself and they unfurled the banner of revolt. In this revolt against the alien rulers, they represented not only their own narrow class interests but the interests of the whole nation; for, as Velu Thampi made clear in his Kundara Proclamation, he was defending against the British not only the privileges of his master, Raja of Travancore, but also the land, the articles of daily use, the social and religious practices, of the entire people – all of which were threatened by the British. And it is this natonal character of their revolt that made them leaders of a movement which the prince was united with the peasant and in which the soldier was not a mercenary-but a real defender of the people's hearths and homes.

These revolts, however, proved futile since the enemy was too powerful for the people. Not only were the British military forces far superior but they were able politically to divide and disrupt the ranks of the rebels. A section of those who raised the banner of revolt was, from the very beginning, vacillating; e.g.

Paliyath Achan who joined Velu Thampi first, subsequently made peace with the enemy. Furthermore, there were very powerful sections of the ruling class which stoutly opposed the revolt. These political weaknesses on the part of the rebels were intensified as they had to suffer military reverses and heavy casualties. Col. Macaulay could, therefore, very easily and quickly inflict total defeat on Velu Thampi, who, to save himself from the humiliation of surrender, killed himself. Col. Macaulay wreaked his vengeance on the rebels by heaping on them unspeakable atrocities too much even for the Government of India which condemned Macaulay's conduct.

The rebellion of the Raja of Pazhassi did, of course, take a longer time to quell than that of Velu Thampi because of the terrain of Kottayam-Wynad taluks which are ideally suited for the tactics of guerrilla warfare. But that, too, was ultimately crushed as heroism, even when combined with favourable terrain, was inadequate to meet an enemy militarily far superior.

II

With this came to an end the national revolt against the British so far as the erstwhile ruling, feudal classes of Kerala are concerned; the descendants of the Rajas, Naduvazhis, Desavazhis, etc., found that the new power that rose on the ashes of the old social order, of which their predecessors were the guardians, was too strong for them. What is more, the new power was such that, if only they were prepared to submit to its domination, they stood to lose nothing and to gain everything out of its stabilization. We, therefore, find that, after the suppression of Velu Thampi's and Pazhassi Raja's revolts, the feudal classes as a whole became loyal supporters of British rule.

This, however, was not the case with the peasants and the common people who had magnificently rallied under the banner of revolt unfurled by Velu Thampi and Pazhassi Raja. For, as we have seen in the last chapter, their daily lives continued to become worse and worse; anti-imperialism was not for them (as it was for the feudal classes) a mere national sentiment but

a question of daily life. It is true that being oppressed and unenlightened, they could not organize a successful struggle against the main enemy, or even see the real enemy, i. e., imperialism. Nevertheless, they were the people who suffered daily and hourly, from the concrete results of the operations of the enemy and hence were acutely conscious of the necessity for the practical struggle against the concrete manifestations of the feudal-colonial economy set up by the British rulers. Spontaneous peasant actions therefore started developing in Malabar.

It was in 1809 that Velu Thampi's revolt was suppressed and about the same time Pazhassi Raja was captured by the British. Within a quarter of a century of the suppression of these revolts broke out the first of the series of peasant revolts commonly known as the Moplah outbreaks (the first of these took place in 1836).

The British rulers tried at first to suppress these outbreaks by employing the same tactics of terror as were found useful in suppressing the national revolt led by the erstwhile ruling feudal classes; they banished one of the leaders of the Moplah community (Syed Fazal Pookkoya Thangal) from India (1852) and enacted what is called the Moplah Outrages Act. The British adopted a policy of suppressing the Moplahs on the theory that Muslims as a community are anti-British.

But, when they found they found that this policy did not yield the desired result but that outbreak after outbreak was taking place, they decided in the year 1870 to make proper investigations into the root causes of these disturbances. The officer who was appointed to make this investigation (Logan) reported that indiscriminate evictions and enhancements of rent on the part of the *jenmis* lay at the root of the disturbances.

A similar development was taking place in Travancore, though not in the form of Moplah riots. There, too, as the *Travancore State Manual* says,

The monopoly in land and sense of insecurity on account of the *jenmi's* right of eviction became causes of complaint by the

cultivating peasants. The steady increase of population and the absence of any other profession except agriculture led to more and more persons becoming dependent on land for their subsistence. The *jenmis* having no source of income except their lands were compelled to exact as much as they could from their tenants and this only increased their discontent. The great demand for cultivable lands helped the *jenmis* to let his lands to the highest bidder ... The increase in the value of the land gave the *jenmis* their opportunity. They began to demand from their tenants larger sums as advances and larger rents. If a tenant failed to comply with the *jenmi's* demand, he was promptly turned out of his holding. This led to serious discontent among the agricultural classes and complaints were made to the Government. (Vol. III, p. 161).

It was to allay this discontent, adds the *State Manual*, that the Maharaja of Travancore, in a communication to the Appeal Court, directed that in respect of all suits for eviction, the courts should see that the *jenmis* receive their dues and allow the tenants to remain in possession of and enjoy their property.

It was thus that the first anti-feudal mass movement began to take shape — the movement for tenancy reforms. The demand was raised that the *jenmi's* right of eviction should be curtailed and that he should not be allowed to take excessive rents from tenants. Committee after committee studied the problem, drafted bills, made recommendations, etc., with a view to solving the problem of land relations in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. Tenants' associations were organized, deputations led, meetings held and forms of agitation resorted to by the well-to-do peasants (mostly *kanamdars*) from whose ranks are drawn the professionals and government officials.

It is true that this was not a mass movement in the full sense of the term since its demands were confined to that which affected the *kanamdars;* the large mass of peasants, the *verumpattamdars*, were kept out of the movement. It

was, however, a mass movement in a general sense, since the target of attack of the agitators — the *jenmi* — was the common oppressor of the entire peasantry. The leaders of the movement in Malabar did, of course, subsequently (after 1930) join hands with the *jenmis* against the mass of peasantry but they did the preliminary job of making the struggle against the *jenmi* a national and popular movement. Hence, though the organized peasant movement of the last five decades has had to contend with the treachery of the original leaders of the tenancy movement and evolve a new leadership, there is no doubt that it was the tenancy movement that gave our peasants the first elements of class consciousness --- the consciousness that they should unite as a class and fight their enemy, the *jenmi*.

III

Having far more of a mass character than the tenancy movement but far less clear in regard to its class content was the movement of the oppressed and untouchable castes for social equality. It was towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries that the Nairs and Ezhavas began to organize themselves into caste associations, the Nair Service Society and the S N.D.P. Yogam. The circumstances under which they organized were described by one author as follows:

It was on Edavam 2, 1708, Malayalam Era (May 16, 1903) that the S.N.D.P. Yogam was registered. The origin of the Yogam is a confluence of two streams, one spiritual, the other political. In the year 1067 Malayalam Era (1891-92 A D.), over 10,000 people signed and submitted the famous Malayalee Memorial to the Maharaja of Travancore in which it was demanded that the political rights of the Malayalees should be protected against the attacks of outsiders. That Memorial sharply accused the Government of having refused admission of Ezhavas in government schools and doing nothing to safeguard their rights. The reply of the Government to this Memorial said that the Ezhavas were quite satisfied with their traditional occupations like agriculture, toddy-tapping, coir-making, etc., that they were not interested

in higher education or government service; and that political agitators had just included them among the signatories to the Memorial in order to increase their numerical strength.

As a matter of fact, however, one of the organizers of the Malayalee Memorial was Dr. Palpu, who had secured his I.M.S. diploma but could get no job in Travancore and hence had to seek refuge in the Mysore service. Long before the Malayalee Memorial, Dr. Palpu had been carrying on agitation by way of Memorials to the government as well as through news paper articles, demanding that Ezhavas should get at least those rights which they could get if they become Christians. Finding this agitation to have no fruit, he organized the submission of a Memorial to the Maharaja with over 13,000 signatories and seeking the redress of their grievances. Since this, too, proved of no avail, the Ezhavas of Travancore were in a demoralized stage.

It was at this time that Swami Vivekananda had returned from America and started his all-India tour with a view to the restoration of Hindu religion in all its glory. The representative of this new movement in Kerala, Sree Narayana Guruswamy, established a temple at Aruvipuram and, in 1074 Malayalam Era [A.D. 1898-99], registered a Yogam [association] to carry on the affairs of the temple. The Swami and Dr. Palpu being old friends, the spiritual brilliance of the Swami was now combined with the militant spirit of social service of the doctor, so that the organization that functioned under their joint leadership became efficient. On Dhanu 23, 1078 Malayalam Era [A.D. January 5, 1903] a special session of the Yogam was held at which it was decided to transform the Yogam into the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam [S.N.D.P.] with the aims and objects of developing the spiritual and secular education, and helping the economic advancement, of the Ezhavas.

In the meantime, Kumaran Asan had come back from Calcutta after his education in Sanskrit. The combination of the holy Swami, the efficient oranizer Dr. Palpu and the hard-working Asan, made the Yogam well-known throughout Kerala; its annual sessions were held at Aruvipuram, Quilon,

Alleppey, Trivandrum [all in Travancore], Ernakulam [Cochin], Cannanore and Calicut [Malabar]. Along with the annual sessions held at Quilon and Cannanore, large-scale exhibitions were also organized. Apart from rousing the social consciousness of the Ezhava masses in and around the various venues of these conferences, these sessions also served to demonstrate the united force of, and create a sense of solidarity in the Ezhava masses from the Cape in the South to the border of Karnatak in the North.

The Ezhavas are a community which is numerically the strongest, and socially and culturally the most advanced, among the non-caste Hindus. Suffering as they do various inequalities of a non-Hindu community, including untouchability, they became the champions of the struggle against untouchability and other forms of social inequality. Being socially and culturally more advanced than the scheduled castes, they could, more easily than the latter, create forms of agitation and organization which would prove useful in the struggle for social equality. They, therefore, became the main source of inspiration to, and the virtual leaders of, all the oppressed and untouchable castes. Naturally therefore, the formation of the S. N. D. P. Yogam was followed by the formation of caste organizations of the various untouchable castes.

This tendency to form caste organizations was, however, not confined to the Ezhavas and the untouchables. In fact, at the very time when the Swami, the Doctor and the Asan were organizing the Ezhavas in their S. N.D.P. Yogam, some leaders of the Nair community were forming their caste organization. The Nairs are no doubt one of the privileged castes; but they too, suffered various inequalities in relation to castes that are above them, e. g., the Namboodiris. Furthermore, they had various social problems relating to marriage, family, inheritance, etc., which, in the eyes of the enlightened representatives of the community, were far too outmoded and required radical transformations. It was thus that various caste organizations were formed all over Kerala, though they could not be centralized under such a dynamic personality as Sri Narayana Guru of the Ezhavas.

The tendency to form caste organizations ultimately reached the highest caste, the Namboodiris. They are, of course, the most privileged in the social order. But for the same reason, their system of the family, marriage and inheritance was as outmoded as that of any other cast. It, therefore, raised various problems, the solution of which was considered by the enlightened representatives of the community as necessary for their advancement. They too, therefore, came to form their own caste organization.

Almost all castes were thus organizing themselves in their respective caste organizations. The most significant of them, however, were the organizations of the oppressed and untouchable castes; it was they that, for the first time in the history of Kerala, started mobilizing the overwhelming majority of the peasantry against the prevailing social order which was oppressive to the entire people of Kerala. The formation of the caste organizations of these sections of people, together with the tenancy movement as explained above, laid the basis for the rising peasant movement.

IV

It is easy enough to see today that these caste organizations are not the class organizations of the peasantry; they on the contrary, consolidate the caste separatism of the people in general and of the peasantry in particular, so that the grip of these caste organizations on the peasantry has to be broken if they are to be organized as a class. It is, however, a historical fact that one of the first forms in which the peasant masses rose in struggle against feudalism was in the form of caste organizations. In spite of the fact that they had no clear perspective of changing the social order, of breaking the backs of the landlords as a class, of ending the rent system and redistributing lands, the Nair peasantry rose against the Brahmin *ienmis* and the Ezhava peasantry against their caste-Hindu oppressors, including the Nairs. It was this peasant character of the caste organizations that made them part and parcel of the national politics of our country.

It has become fashionable for those who consider themselves

nationalists to denounce these caste organizations as anti-national and 'reactionary' because they sought the help of the British imperialists in getting their grievances redressed. They however, forget the main point that in spite of their illusions as to the 'progressive-democratic character' of the British an illusion which they shared with the pre-Tilak generation of nationalists-they roused and organized the masses against some aspects of the oppressive social order. The Nair and Ezhava peasants who were first roused against caste oppression and for a fairer and juster social order were sure, in course of time, to advance further along the road of struggle. When they did this, they could not but break the chain of pro-imperialist illusions that bound them in the first phase of their organization and struggle.

We will see in the following chapters that this was actually what happened in Kerala. The peasants who were roused by, and organized in, caste organizations in the early years of the twentieth century were subsequently brought into the fold of the anti-imperialist national movement in the twenties and into the class organization of the peasantry in the thirties and forties. It was this steady progress of the peasantry from a defeated and leaderless mass (which it was in the years after Velu Thampi and Pazhassi Raja) to an organized class, allied to the emerging working class, that is the main driving force of our democratic movement. But, before going into a description of this absorbing topic, we should clear up one point—the economic content and class significance of caste oppression in the conditions of our feudal-colonial economic order.

The Brahmins stand on the highest and the scheduled castes on the lowest rung of the caste ladder; the Nairs, other Hindus, Christians and Muslims stand in between the two. This system represented, in pre-British days, a system of political administration, the highest caste being so not only from a social point of view but also in the sense of being the ruling caste. It is true that this system did not continue undisturbed but had already begun to change long before the establishment of British rule. It was, however, only under the British that the administrative system was made completely independent of the caste system.

With the separation, under the British, of the caste system from the administrative machinery, caste acquired a new content; it became a rough index of the economic status of the people, the highest caste being the most prosperous and the lowest ones being economically the most oppressed It is true that, as a result of the development of market relations and the consequent growth of new classes and strata of society, several families of high-caste people became pauperized, while several in the lower castes became prosperous. It, however, remains a fact that the comparative prosperity and poverty of an average family in each caste roughly corresponds to the position of that caste in the caste hierarchy.

For example, the 1941 Economic Survey of Travancore gives the following percentage distribution of families by caste and annual income groups:

ANNUAL INCOME GROUP

Caste	*Below Rs 60*	*Rs.61-120*	*Rs 121-180*	*Rs.181-300*	*Rs 301-480*	*Rs.481-840*	*Rs.841 and above*	*Total*
Brahmin	3.1	15.1	12.0	21.0	16.1	13.5	17.2	100
Nair	18.3	33.6	18.3	15.4	7.9	4.1	2 4	100
Ezhava	24.3	42.0	18.0	10.4	3.2	1.3	0.8	100
Other Hindus	16.6	34.0	21.7	15.5	7.1	3.3	1.8	100
Backward Communities	27.6	45.5	15.3	8.1	1.9	0.5	1.1	100
Christian	18.1	38.8	18.8	13.7	5.6	3.2	1.8	100
Muslim	20.3	39.1	18.1	12.8	5.2	2.7	1.8	100
All castes	20.3	39.1	18 1	12.9	5.2	2.7	1.7	100

In other words,

1. The caste that has the minimum percentage of families in the lowest income group as well as the maximum percentage in the highest income group is the Brahmins.

2. The caste that has the maximum percentage of families in the lowest income group are the backward, followed by the Ezhava. These are also the two castes that have the minimum percentage of families in the highest income group.

3. The two groups of Hindus that stand in the caste hierarchy in between the Brahmin on the one hand and the Ezhava and other backward communities on the other—Nairs and other Hindus—are below the average of all non-Brahmin castes in relation to the percentage of families in the lowest income groups (below Rs. 120); while they are above the average in respect of the percentage in the income groups higher than these two.

The same picture is seen in five typical villages of Cochin surveyed in 1936 both as regards per capita value of property of and net annual income per family.

PER CAPITA VALUE OF PROPERTY

Caste	*Anthikkad*	*Chundal*	*Vengannallur*	*Vallivattam*	*Thiruvazhiyad*
	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.
Namboodiri	30,593	94,179	18,449	——	——
Nair	3,397	3,902	942	1,847	6,326
Other caste Hindus	10,848	5,250	2,772	——	24,918
Ezhava	850	521	69	887	263
Pulaya*	13	30	18	7	17
Paraya*	——	20	——	——	——
Kanakka*	——	22	——	13	——
Muslim	412	217	243	1,410	253
Christian	1,772	1,381	240	1,070	8,483

*Scheduled castes

NET ANNUAL INCOME PER FAMILY

Caste	*Anthikkad*	*Chundal*	*Venganallur*	*Vallivattam*	*Thiruvazhiyad*
	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.
Namboodiri	496	2,887	520	——	——
Nair	179	215	134	89	278
Other caste Hindus	818	300	222	——	——
Ezhava	98	107	107	118	126
Pulaya*	83	112	79	112	101
Paraya*	——	94	——	——	——
Kanakka*	——	——	——	——	——
Muslim	107	113	113	99	111
Christian	134	128	109	148	98

*Scheduled castes

It should, however, be mentioned that the overwhelming majority of people of all castes are interested in the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal struggle, since they are all the victims of feudal-colonial exploitation. For, while it is true, as the figures given above clearly indicate, that a bigger proportion of lower caste people belong to the low income groups than higher castes, a good proportion of the latter, too, are in the low-income categories. According to the 1941 Economic Survey of Travancore, for example, 868 out of 1630 Brahmin families, i.e., over 50 per cent. have annual incomes of below Rs. 300 or monthly income of below Rs. 25 (only 117 out of 1630 or one in every nine Brahmin families have annual incomes of above Rs. 1000). That this compares favourably to the Ezhava with 93.9 per cent below Rs. 300 level, to the Christian with 85.6 per cent, to the Nair with 85.6 per cent, to other Hindus with 86.8 per cent, to the backward communities with 86.5 per cent and to the Muslims with the 90.4 per cent respectively in the same category, does not negate the fact that the incomes of over half of the families even in the highest caste are below the subsistence level.

It is in the covering up of this basic poverty of the masses of all communities, of the consequent need of the masses of all communities for the ending of the feudal-colonial economy, that the potentially reactionary character of the caste and communal organizations consisted. We shall see further on that these organizations at a subsequent stage of their evolution began to play precisely this role of preventing the development of class consciousness among the masses. But in the first stage of their development, they played a totally different role, the role of infusing the spirit of revolt among the downtrodden masses (though of particular castes), of organising them against the regime of oppression and injustice. That is why Sri Narayana Guru, the saintly leader of the Ezhavas must be considered the first inspirer and organizer of the mass democratic movement of the cultivating and landless peasant masses of Kerala. The communal organizations of lower castes are thus the first form in which the peasantry got itself organized and started its struggle for democracy.

7

The Great National Upsurge and The Disgraceful Betrayal

We saw in an earlier chapter that the industrial bourgeoisie is very weakly developed in Kerala because our economy is feudal-colonial rather than capitalistic. This, however, does not mean that there is no bourgeois class. The development of market relations in our country necessarily led, as we have seen, to the development of certain classes and strata of society which, though closely tied to pre-capitalist modes of production, are simultaneously tied to the system of world capitalism.

Which are these classes and strata of society? First, that section of the landlords, usurers and non-cultivating tenants who look upon their land not as the expression of feudal power and privileges as it had been but as a form of investment on which they should get adequate return, in other words, those who have made it their practice to look upon land as a commodity to be bought and sold in the market. The characteristic feature which marks them off from other landlords is that their outlook towards property is capitalistic; the feature which marks them off from capitalists is that their mode of exploitation is partly feudal and not fully capitalistic.

Second, the well-to-do cultivators and landlords, who do not themselves work in the fields but employ wage-labour to get their lands cultivated, or engage far more of wage-labour than their own or family labour. Here the direct mode of production is capitalistic, i. e. appropriation of surplus value. But it is tied to the feudal form of exploitation in several ways; liability of the cultivator to pay to landlords; mortgage on land; some

cultivators being usurers, the labourers working under semi-serf conditions, etc.

Third, traders, wholesale and retail. They are the direct representatives of capitalistic economy, being the agency through which the national market operates. They, too, however, are tied to feudal modes of production and exploitation in several ways, their customers and they themselves being mostly tenants or landlords.

Fourth, government officials and professionals (lawyers, doctors, journalists, teachers, etc.) and other intellectuals. They too, are drawn from classes which are tied to feudal forms of exploitation as landlords or tenants. They are, however, part of an administrative apparatus which is designed to keep the Indian economy tied to the world market and which, therefore, is an essentially capitalistic state machine.

Fifth, industrial capitalists, though comparatively few in number, are the people who are tied to the capitalistic mode of production to a far greater extent than anybody else, since they, together with capitalist farmers, are the first real appropriators of surplus value. They, too, however, are indirectly tied to feudal forms of exploitation—many of them even directly. Some of them are themselves feudal landlords, who, of late, have gone into industry. Several others are such that, though they started as industrialists, have recently acquired the status of landlords as well, since they had nowhere to invest their profits except in land. The rest are tied to feudal forms of exploitation not as exploiters but as the exploited; for, they are tenants of feudal landlords and are thus subjected to payment of rent and other forms of feudal exploitation.

Finally, there are the artisans, peasants, workers and low-paid salaried employees. They are subjected on the one hand to the exploitation of the manipulation of the market and of the capitalistic system of taxation; on the other hand they are in several ways, tied to feudal exploitation.

The growth of these classes and strata of society dealt as

heavy a blow to the social and ideological superstructure of pre-capitalist Kerala as the development of market relations did to its economic basis. Just as the development of market relations broke the self-sufficient economy of Kerala, bringing it into the fold of the capitalistic world market, so did the growth of these classes and strata of society bring the social and ideological system of Kerala under the influence of world capitalistic culture. Just as it was under the British capitalist system that Kerala was made part of the world capitalistic system, so was it under the British that capitalistic culture was brought into Kerala. Just as the development of market relations did not destroy the pre-capitalist economy, but transformed it from a militarist-feudal to feudal-colonial economy, so was the introduction of capitalist culture a superimposition on, and not the destruction of, the pre-capitalist ideological superstructure.

One of the distinguishing features of the new classes and strata that grew up in British days is that they were drawn from all castes. Disregarding all caste injunctions that so and so should take up such and such a job since he belongs to such and such a caste, everybody got such training for and sought such jobs as he or she could get. Government officials, professionals, traders, etc., grew up from all castes, including those on the lowest rungs of the ladder; on the other hand, people of even the highest castes became pauperized and were forced to seek jobs that could not have been dreamt of by their predecessors a couple of generations ago.

It is true that the higher caste people had greater opportunities of getting better jobs than their lower-caste brethren; even as recently as in 1941, Brahmins who formed only 1.6 per cent of the total population in Travancore constituted 20.5 per cent of the professional classes earning above Rs. 1,200 a year; while Ezhavas with a population of 17.5 per cent of the total got only 4.2 per cent of the professional jobs of the same income group (*Travancore Economic Survey*). But the very fact that at least a few of the low caste people got jobs that are considered respectable, that the people of high castes had to compete with their low-caste brethren in schools, offices,

factories, markets, etc., was enough to make a dent in the social system based on caste separatism. Real day-to-day life, the intense competition between individuals and groups to live better than others, made it impossible for people of higher castes to claim that they are superior to other castes; it also gave hope and confidence to the people of lower castes that they need not submit to their humiliating position.

It was out of this that the first form of the modern democratic movement took its origin in Kerala — the movement for social equality. The Nairs, the Ezhavas and the Syrian Christians took the lead into it because they are the most enlightened among the unprivileged sections, or rather sections with comparatively few privileges. Very soon, however, it spread to other castes like the scheduled castes and even to Brahmins. Each of these castes began with agitation for some of the specific demands of that caste alone, but they all moved steadily forward and, in a couple of generations, came to the general slogan of "abolition of all caste restrictions".

We saw in the last chapter how the Ezhavas under their saintly leader, Sri Narayana Guru, organized themselves in their caste organization and how Nairs also were at that time fighting against Brahmin domination. It was this very Sri Narayana Guru who coined the slogan, 'One Caste, One God, One Religion'. The slogan brought about a veritable social revolution among the Ezhavas to begin with, but very rapidly caught the imagination of radicals belonging to all castes. For, it gave concrete expression to the dissatisfaction felt not only by the peasant but by the middle classes as well, against the outmoded system which kept some castes below others. Inter-caste dining, and marriage, began to be preached on a large scale and practised too, though on a much smaller scale.

This movement, however, did not confine itself to the demand for the abolition of inequalities based on caste. It also demanded the total overhauling of the family system, i.e., convertion of the family from matriarchal to patriarchal; prohibition of polygamy, polyandry and other forms of marital relationships that had been handed down from ancient tribal society;

an end to the impartible character of the joint family (both patriarchal and matriarchal). At the same time, this movement encouraged and advocated marriage on the basis of love and not on the basis of the will of parents. The objective of the movement was thus the establishment of the bourgeois family.

It was through this aspect of the movement that the higher castes — the Namboodiris, the Nairs and other caste Hindus — came into the movement for social reforms. Individual partition of joint family property became the rallying slogan first of the Nairs, then of the Namboodiris and ultimately of all caste Hindus. Abolition of the matriarchal family and its substitution by the patriarchal family, right of partition for members of joint families, abolition of polygamy and other outmoded forms of marriage were demanded by all progressive Hindus. These demands of the progressives of various castes were given legislative approval in the form of a series of enactments like the Nair Regulation, the Marumakkathayam (Matriarchal) Act, the Namboodiri Act, the Kshatriya Act, the Ezhava Regulation, etc.

The thirst for basic transformations in the social system was reflected in the field of culture. One of the leaders and organizers of the caste organziation of the Ezhavas, Kumaran Asan, was also the pioneer of modern lyrical poetry in Malayalam. It was he who took the initiative in describing the emotions of ordinary young men and women in love, instead of confining himself to describing the heroic deeds of gods or kings as conventional poets used to do. Together with Asan the founder of lyrical poetry, was the founder of the Malayalam novel, Chandu Menon, whose *Indulekha* was the first effective exposure of the decadent practices of the *jenmis* and theirs satellites. Other branches of literature like the essay, the story, the newspaper and magazine article, the book review, etc., began to take shape. Grammar, rhetoric and other branches of the science of language and writing also appeared. Forms of cultural activity such as the drama, painting and other arts, music, etc., began to develop.

The combination of these social and cultural activities of the middle classes and of the enlightened sections of the upper classes with the spontaneous discontent of the peasant masses – the combination, very often, in the same person or group, of the social reformer, the leader of cultural life, the organizer of a caste association – was really the initial form in which the national and democratic movement emerged. It was in this combination that the unorganized and leaderless mass of peasantry was first brought under the leadership of those sections of the bourgeoisie that had started developing.

This movement was not yet a national movement in the real sense of the term, since it was not directed against the national oppressor – the British imperialists. Nor was it even a genuine anti-feudal movement, since it was not directed against the princely order, nor was it for the total abolition of landlordism. It was, however, the beginning of the national democratic movement, since it united the cultivating and landless peasant with the bourgeoisie, and even with the enlightened section of the feudal, ruling classes.

The literary associations and activities of the last years of the ninteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century, in which members of the ruling families of Cochin and Travancore and other families of the feudal class cooperated with the members of the untouchable, Christian and Muslim communities; the caste associations in which people of all walks of life (in a particular community) joined in demanding and collectively enforcing particular social reforms; the tenancy movement which united the highest-paid government official and the professional with the humblest peasant—these were the beginnings of a new form of united action of the immense majority of the people for the benefit not of a small minority but of the entire nation. It was, in other words, the initial form of the national upsurge which swept the country in the twenties and thirties of this century.

II

It was, however, only in the years after the end of the First

World War that the national movement described in the last section went out of its purely social reform and cultural limits and acquired the character of a political movement For, it was then that the middle classes and the peasantry were drawn into the big political upheaval that was then sweeping over all parts of India.

Political activity had, of course, started long before the First World War. Professionals from among the Malayalees who were residing in Madras, and had thus had the opportunity, participated in the activities of Indian National Congress. One of them, the late Sir C. Sankaran Nair, was even elected to the presidentship of one of the earlier sessions of the Congress. It is also remarkable that the first Malayalam novel, *Indulekha*, is not only an exposure of the decadent *jenmi* and joint family system of Kerala but contains appreciative references to the Congress. But this was confined more to the professional Malayalees living outside Kerala than to the people of Kerala.

The years between the partition of Bengal and the beginning of the First World War, which made tremendous change in the political situation of India, were years of comparative political inactivity in Kerala. The solitary incident which may be said to be an indication that the Malayalee middle class was slowly but unmistakably coming into political activity was the determined fight put up by K. Ramakrishna Pillai, a radical journalist of Trivandrum, against the then Dewan of Travancore. His articles in the paper *Swadeshabhimani* were so powerful an exposure of the Dewan's misdeeds that Ramakrishna Pillai was exiled from Travancore in 1910. It is significant that Ramakrishna Pillai was the first author in Malayalam language, and to the knowledge of the writer of these lines, one of the first two in any Indian language, the other being Har Dayal who wrote in Hindi, to write a biography of Karl Marx; his *Karl Marx* appeared in 1912. Had Lenin come to know of this as he came to know of the 1908 strike action of the Bombay working class, he would have said not only that the Indian working class was coming into action but that the Indian intellectuals were on the way to becoming the vehicles of socia-

list consciousness.

Ramakrishna Pillai, however, was a solitary figure in the political field in those pre-war years. It is true that he had the sympathy of thousands of ordinary men and women in Travancore : as he himself describe in his article on 'Exile' tens of thousands of people crowded around him at Trivandrum and on the way to the border of Travancore when he was being taken out of the state. The middle class as a class, was however not yet concious enough to transform this popular sentimenat into a militant peoples movement. What is more, Ramakrishna Pillai himself did not go further than exposing the misdeeds of the Dewan; he did not realize the necessity of ending either the system of princely autocracy in the state of Travancore or of imperialist domination in India, or even bringing about reforms in the system. Hence, though Ramakrishna Pillai's fight against the Dewan may be considered to be the beginning of the entry of the middle class into the arena of politics, the solitary nature of his fight should be taken as an indication that they had a long way to go before becoming an active political force.

In the years of the First World War and after however, the situation changed. The Home Rule Movement, initiated and powerfully led by Annie Besant, caught the imagination of the middle class in Kerala. A significant incident took place at Calicut where a meeting was being held under the chairmanship of the Collector to canvass support for Britain's war effort. A member of the audience started to speak in Malayalam, but was asked by the chairman to speak in English; he refused to do so. This led to a commotion. It was, in fact, far more significant than a single incident; it showed that the young and growing middle class was no more prepared to let the domination of the British rulers go unchallenged. The speaker was opposed not only to speaking in English in his own country, but also to India giving war loans to Britain, for he said: "It is strange that a debtor (India) should give loans to a creditor (Britain)."

The Young man who attempted to speak in Malayalam at the

Calicut meeting, was not a solitary figure as Ramakrishna Pillai was a few years ago. Other men and women of the middle class had become politicalized. Home Rule Leagues were springing up all over Malabar. But it was the students of Trivandrum who played the role of pioneers of political demon strations. On November 2, 1919 was organized the first political demonstration of protest in front of the Thampanur Hall where government stooges were holding a meeting, in the name of the public of Trivandrum, in support of the constitutional reforms that were then being introduced in Travancore. This was an index showing that the students had already entered the arena of political activity. This was followed two years later (in September-October 1921) by the mass students' strike against the enhancement of fees that was done by the government at that time, followed by the first ferocious attacks on students by the minions of the government.

The entry of the middle class into the arena of political activity gave the peasants what they had been lacking ever since the days of Velu Thampi and Pazhassi Raja—organized learder-ship in militant struggles. Home Rule Leagues in the later years of the war and the first post-war years, Congress and Khilafat Committees in 1920-21; Tenancy Committees which worked hand in hand with the Congress Committees—these were the organs of struggle through which the middle class of Malabar tried to organize the broad masses of the people against British imperialism and feudal landlordism. The Malabar District Political Conference(1920) held at Manjeri, where the battle was fought between the advocates and opponents of the policy of non-cooperation, was the first example of peasants being mobilized by the radical middle class in support of a militant political line. It is significant that, together with the issue of non-cooperation, the issue of tenancy reform was also put before that political conference, the opposing camps on the issue of non-cooperation more or less coinciding with the two camps on the issue of tenancy reform.

It was a year after the Manjeri (Malabar District) Political Conference, i. e., in April 1921, that the First Kerala Provincial

Conference was held at Ottapalam. The movement for non-cooperation was then in full swing; a large number of students had already left their educational institutions while a number of lawyers had given up practice. As at Manjeri a year ago, so at Ottapalam, thousands of peasants assembled from all over Malabar. The most significant aspect of this conference was, however, that delegates came from all over Kerala and were not confined to Malabar as they were at Manjeri. The official historian of the Congress in Kerala remarks that the conference was the first all-Kerala gathering since the days of Mamankam (the gathering of the leaders of Kerala to settle national questions which, according to tradition, used to be held once in twelve years).

The movement for social reform and cultural advancement, described in the previous section of this chapter, also got a new impetus from this political movement. The middle class that was entering the field of political struggle was radical in every respect. What they wanted was not just some constitutional reforms but basic change in the existing social order. It can be seen that it was in the period of the non-cooperation movement that the caste organizations of the Namboodiri, the Nair and the Ezhava began to get a new generation of cadres who wanted not minor reforms but a radical transformation in the system. It was again in this period that a group of young Muslims started advocating progressive changing in their own social prctices. Political literaure and other forms of new writing also began to take shape as part of the political mass movement. (The poet Vallathol became famous in this period through his patriotic songs).

Here, therefore, was a combination of all those factors that together make a real national democratic movement—the movement of the entire people for freedom from alien rule; of the peasants for freedom from landlord exploitation; of the Malayalee as a people for national unity; of the masses belonging to the lower castes, as well as of the progressive belonging to the higher castes, for major and basic changes in the existing social order: of the intellectuals for the development of a modern progressive culture. Nor was this movement confined to one

or two classes, strata and groups of people, but like all genuine national democratic movements, embraced the entire people, from illiterate peasants, to the enlightened and patriotic sections of the feudal upper classes.

III

It was in the states part of Kerala that the national movement in its first phase, the phase of social reform, tenancy movement, etc., was stronger and deeper. Each of the caste organizations took shape first in Travancore and then spread to Cochin and Malabar. The various legislations like the Nair Regulation, etc., went into the statute book first in Travancore, then in Cochin and lastly in Malabar. The tenancy Act also took the same course. While Travancore had its Tenancy Regulation in 1896 conferring fixity of tenure on *Kanamdars*, an identical regulation was passed in Cochin only in 1915 and in Malabar in 1930.

But when the national democratic movement entered its second phase, the phase of political struggle, the states part of Kerala lagged behind Malabar; in Malabar the 1919-21 national upsurge took stronger roots than either in Travancore or in Cochin. Travancore and Cochin had, of course, their political agitation; Congress committees were formed in these states also; a good contingent of the delegates who attended the First Kerala Provincial Conference, held at Ottapalam in April 1921, came from the states part of Kerala. All this, however was confined to the middle classes and that, too, mainly in the towns. It was in Malabar that the distinguishing feature of a national democratic movement - the combination in action of the middle classes in towns with the 'million-headed peasantry' in the villages—manifested itself. Furthermore, the political national movement in Malabar embraced all castes and communities—as a matter of fact, the fraternization of Hindus and Muslims was one of the specific features of the movement, while the movement in the states part of Kerala was more or less confined to the Hindus and that, too, mainly to caste Hindus.

The difference in the tempo and strength of the national movement in its two phases can of course be explained partly by the

differences in the historically--evolved material conditions of Malabar on the one hand and Travancore and Cochin on the other. For, one of the 'reforms' made by the pre-British rulers of these two states (Marthanda Varma in Travancore, Shakthan Thampuran in Cochin) was that they confiscated the landed properties of all the feudal chieftains who resisted the attempts of the ruler to create a centralized administrative apparatus. The result was that a considerable part of the lands in both these states became *Pandara Vaka* or rulers' property. Travancore had an additional 'reform' under 'Resident-Dewan' Munro (Col. Munro who followed Col. Macaulay as Resident was simultaneously the Dewan of Travancore and Cochin and Resident) : all the landed properties of Hindu temples (*devaswams*) were transferred to government which met the expenses of the temples out of its revenue.

The lands that are thus the property of the government in one or another sense constitute in Travancore seventy five per cent of all cultivable lands in the state plus all the fallow, waste and forest lands. The percentage of such government lands in Cochin (where the confiscation of the feudal chieftains' lands was less thorough than in Travancore and where *devaswam* lands were not transferred to the government) was fifty per cent. Malabar, on the other hand, had virtually no government land, all the cultivable, waste, fallow and even forest lands (except government reserves and small stretches of poramboks) being declared private property.

The grip of the rent-receiving landlords was, therefore, far greater in Malabar than in Cochin or Travancore where there was greater opportunity for well-to-do cultivators to make savings and to develop into capitalist farmers, money-lenders, etc., It was under the strong pressure of these elements what may be termed the rising rural bourgeois elements—that Maharaja of Travancore issued his 1820 proclamation advising the *jenmis* not to eject *kanamdars*, followed by the 1867 proclamation and the 1896 act which totally prohibited ejectment. It was also under the pressure of the same elements that the Maharaja of Cochin had a Tenancy Act passed in 1915. It was these elements that started the agitation against caste inequalties and

for the reform of the family, inheritence and marriage system in respect of which again we find that Malabar had its legislations passed more than a decade later than Travancore and Cochin.

While this difference in the historically-evolved material conditions explains the greater tempo in the states of the social reform phase of the national movement, it is not by itself an adequate explanation for the greater tempo in Malabar of the later anti-imperialist, political struggle phase. For, the greater strength and vitality of the rising rural bourgeois elements in the states part of Kerala had also expressed itself in the political field, as witnessed by the example of Ramakrishna Pillai at a time when Malabar was politically quiet. Even in the period of the great post-war national political upsurge, Travancore and Cochin contributed their share of militant anti-imperialists. It was because of the pro-feudal policy of the bourgeois national leadership—which, under the false assumtion that the struggle was only against Britain and not against 'Indian' rulers, evolved the theory that 'the national movement should not interfere in the internal affairs of Indian states'—that the cultivating and landless peasants in the states were not drawn into political activity.

Travancore and Cochin would have the same combinations as Malabar—of middle class democrats with the revolutionary peasantry - if only the national bourgeoisie which headed the 1919-21 upsurge had realized that the princes and their satellites in the so-called 'Indian' states are as much the stooges of British imperialism as big landlords and other feudal elements in 'British' India. It may be recalled that it was the combination of the political struggle of the entire people with the anti-feudal struggle of the peasantry (for tenancy reform) that made 1920-21 in Malabar memorable for its glorious national upsurge. There is no doubt that the same thing would have happened in Travancore and Cochin if only the leadership of the national movement had made the same judicious combination of the anti-British and the anti-feudal struggle. For, as Ramakrishna Pillai's struggle against the then Dewan of Travancore showed, and as the suppressed discontent against the rulers' favouritism in both states even in 1920-21 showed was acute discontent

against the rotten and corrupt administration in these states; the absence of a conscious leadersship to head it alone prevented this popular discontent from transforming itself into a powerful political movement.

Such a leadership, however, was absent not only in the 'Indian' states but even in 'British' India. For, it is notorious that the bourgeois national leadership under Mahatma Gandhi was more anxious to restrain the revolutionary masses and to keep them strictly within 'non-violent' limits than to deal a powerful blow against British imperialism and its reactionary Indian allies. It had, to this end, worked out the anti-democratic 'theory' that the exploiters are the 'trustees' of the exploited, as well as the 'theory' that the masses have no moral right to offer militant resistance to the exploiter and oppressor.

Such an anti-democratic leadership was bound, at some stage or other, to come into clash with the Moplah peasants who were roused to acivity in Malabar in 1920-21. For, they were unlike the leadership, anti-imperialist and anti-feudal in the real and full sense of the term. They were genuinely anxious not only to end British rule in India and make the country free, but also to end the British domination in Turkey and other Middle Eastern countries. Their hatred for the alien oppressor was deep-seated. Similarly, the overwhelming majority of them being either landless, or poor peasants holding lands on verumpattam tenure, they wanted not only fixity of tenure for the kanamdar as was demanded by the leaders of the tenancy movement but major changes in the land system, including substantial reduction in rent payable by verumpattadars.

This anti-imperialist and anti-feudal character of the Moplah peasantry naturally made it extremely unlikely that they would remain for long confined to the limits of non-violence laid down by the bourgeois leadership of the national movement. It was nott for a non-violent non-cooperation movement but for real militan action of the masses that the Moplah peasantry was being organised by their local middle leadership. And this organizat-ion was so thorough that the soldiers of the mighty British

empire had to fight hard nearly six months to quell the revolt. The fact that leaders of the rebellion like Haji Kunjahamed established a real people's government in the areas controlled by them; and the skilful use made of the terrain of South Malabar for guerrilla tactics showed that the Moplah peasants, when roused to action, were resourceful enough to devise ways and means of fighting an enemy superior in every respect except in that of people's support.

The bourgeois leadership of the national movement, however, was not prepared for such a combination of the national and agrarian revolutionary movements. On the other hand, the more well-organized and militant the peasants grew, the more panicky became the leadership. Instead of trying to learn the art of revolutionary resistance from the peasantry, they tried to teach the peasants the art of 'non-violent' surrender. Instead of helping the Moplah peasantry, the vanguard of the agrarian revolutionary movement in Kerala, to unite the agrarian revolutionary movement in Kerala, to unite the entire peasantry, they abandoned the vanguard to the tender mercies of the British troops. Had it not been for this disgraceful betrayal by the leadership at the crucial moment, the history of the glorious rebellion of 1921 would have been different.

IV

It is necessary at this stage to dispose of the false 'theory' that the Malabar Rebellion of 1921 was a 'Moplah Rebellion'. This 'theory' has gained currency because it was the Moplah peasants who acted as the vanguard in the movement. Nor need it be disputed that, at a subsequent stage of the movement, i. e., at the stage when British troops had started their depredations and when the British rulers and their Hindu stooges had spread the canard of Muslim fanaticism being the source of the militancy of the peasants, the movement acquired a communal colour. It is, however, far from the truth to say that the rebellion was a communal riot, that the objective of the rebels was the destruction of Hindu religion and that the six months of rebellion were six months of anti-Hindu atrocities.

This will be clear from a few extracts from the booklet on

the 'Moplah Rebellion' by the late C. Gopalan Nair, a retired Deputy Collector and a natural champion of the official view. It should also be stated that this booklet had been commended to the readers by no less a person than the Collector of Malabar. On the incident of the rebellion, the author says :

> The house of V. Mohammed, the local Khilafat Secretary, was searched by the police for a gun alleged to have been stolen from the Pookottur Palace of the Nilambur Thirumulpad and this gave the Moplahs the opportunity for which they were waiting, of asserting the authority and force of the Khilafat movement. On the pretext that the search was unjust and uncalled for, a crowd of several hundreds of Moplahs armed with knives, swords and spears, collected with astounding rapidity and advanced to the Palace. It transpired that they had been summoned from various neighbouring and outlying villages by a tocsin of drums beaten in local and neighbouring mosques. They levied blackmail from the landlords on threat of murder and also threatened to murder the Circle-Inspector of Police who recognized the necessity of dealing tactfully...
>
> No evidence has yet been forthcoming to warrant the allegation regarding agrarian discontent, but it would appear that there was some trouble - what it was, it is not possible to say—between Pookottur Moplahs and the Manager Thirumulpad of the Pookottur Estate. Their lack of cordiality was aggravated by the police search instituted at the instance of the manager and V. Mohammed exploited the Khilafat Movement and the fractious temper of his co-religionists to wreak vengeance. The Moplahs demanded their wages at 9 O'clock that night, threatened the manager and became turbulent. And in this jungly, remote and fanatical hamlet of Pookottur, the civil administration practically ceased to function from 2nd August, 1921. (p. 21-23)

On page 30 he says : In the realm of industry, the Moplah has no rival : his good qualities in ordinary life are admitted : *during the rebellion several instances have occured of Moplahs having helped Hindus to escape*, but individual instances do not

prove the rule. (Emphasis added)

The short biographical sketches that he gives on pages 76-80 of some of the rebel leaders are illuminating.

> *Variankunnath Kunhamed Haji*, of a family of outbreak traditions, as a lad was transported with his father for complicity in a previous outbreak; on his return six or seven years ago he was not allowed to settle down in his native village but after a time he went up to his village and started life as a cartman. On the introduction of the Khilafat Movement, he joined it and became one of its chief workers, organized Sabhas and became the guiding spirit of the Khilafat in Ernad. On the outbreak of the rebellion he became King, *celebrated his accession by the murder of Khan Bahadur Chekkutty, a Moplah retired Police Inspector.*
>
> He styled himself as the Raja of the Hindu, Amir of the Mohammedans and Colonel of the Khilafat Army. He wore a fez cap, wore the Khilafat uniform and badge and he had a sword in his hand. He enjoyed absolute Swaraj in his kingdom of Ernad and Walluvanad. *He announced that he was aware that the inhabitants have suffered greatly from robbing and looting, that he would impose no taxation on them this year* (1921) save in way of donations to the *yudha* fund and that next year the taxes must be forthcoming. *He ordered members of agricultural labourers to reap and bring in the paddy raised in the Thirumulpad's lands*, the harvesters being paid in cash and the grain set apart to feed the Haji's forces. *He issued passports to persons wishing to go out-side his Kingdom and the cost of the pass was a very neglible figure, according to the capacity of the individual concerned.*
> He was captured on the 6th January and shot on 20th January, 1922. (Emphasis added)

This was the most outstanding of the rebel leaders. Now about two of the lesser ones :

> *Seehti Koya Thangal of Kumarampathur* set himself up as the Governor of a Khilafat Principality. *He issued fatwas warn-*

ing his men against looting and other depredations pointing out that the country had become theirs. Three of the rioters implicated in Elampalasseri were punished by him holding his own court-martial. The offenders were ordered to be shot, taking care only to use blank catridges. The men terrified fell down. When they rose there were no injuries which the Thangal attributed to his own marvellous powers and added that his men will similarly be immune from British military attacks. He was captured and shot.

Chembrasseri Imbichi Koya Thangal held his court about midway between Tirur and Karuvarakundu on the slope of a bare hillock with about 4000 followers from neighbouring villages. *More than 40 Hindus were taken to the Thangal with their hands tied behind their back, charged with the crime of helping the military by supplying them with milk, tender cocoanuts etc., and 38 of these were condemned to death.* He suprintended the work of murder in person and took his seat on a rock near a well, witnessed his men cutting at the necks of his victim and pushing the bodies into the well. 38 were murdered, one of whom a pensioned head-constable, to whom he owed a grudge, had his head neatly divided into two halves. Surrendered and shot on 20th January, 1922 (Emphasis added).

Mohammed, the Khilafat Secretary who led the Moplahs against an unpopular estate manager; Kunhamed Haji, the murderer of a Moplah retired police inspector; Seethi Koya Thangal who punished looters in his own camp; Chembrasseri Thangal who murdered thirty-eight persons *for helping the military*—these are not the type of leaders of fanatical Moplahs whose one object in life is to harass and exterminate *kaffirs.* But the most crushing evidence against official apologists is the number of Hindu temples destroyed or desecrated during the five months of more or less rebel domination. On November 14, 1922, the government spokesman answered on the floor of the Madras Legislative Council as follows : 'No statistics have been compiled, but the number of temples destroyed or desecrated must exceed 100. The number is probably large, but for obvious reasons the government have purposely refrained from

attempting to collect accurate figures'.

Now the number of *amsoms* (revenue villages) affected by the rebellion are 220. Calculating at the very conservative rate of five Hindu temples per *amsom*, this 100 comes to nine per cent. Even out of these, it is difficult to know how many were desecrated on suspicion of being used by the military. But leaving that aside and taking it for granted that all were desecrated on purely religious grounds, nine per cent seems to be a surprisingly low figure for a communal outbreak during the first weeks of which the rebels were entirely dominating the scene.

The figures of civilian casualties tell the same tale. On page 58 of the booklet already quoted, the author says : 'It is impossible, in the absence of a census of the rebel area, to state number of persons who were killed by the rebels but the number of persons among the civilian population is believed to be between 500 and 600 according to information supplied by government.' 'No statistics have been compiled regarding the number of women and children among the killed.' (*Madras Mail*, November 14, 1922)

Five hundred to six hundred civilians killed in an area with about four lakhs of Hindus is not an impressive record for a communal riot of more than five month's duration. Its full significance is seen when it is remembered that this 500 to 600 include Khan Saheb Chekkutty, the Moplah retired inspector, the 38 Hindus killed by Chembrasseri Thangal on the charge of helping the military and such similar incidents. How many out of the 500 to 600 were in fact killed for purely religious reasons, it is difficult to say. Their number, however, cannot be very large.

What about forced conversions ? Pandit Rishi Ram, the Arya Samaj missionary, says in a letter : 'In the Arya Samaj registers alone 1,766 cases of forced conversions have been recorded and if the figures from all relief committees were collected, their number is sure to exceed 2,500' (p. 119 of the booklet already quoted). Two thousand five hundred forced conversions in an area with four lakhs Hindus is very low indeed, if it was a

communal riot !

All this, however, does not mean that religious fanaticism was absent in the rebellion. The number of forced conversions which did take place (even if Pandit Rishi Ram's figures are excessive, coming as they do from an Arya Samajist) cannot by any strech of imagination be explained by any other motive than religious fanaticism. Nor it is to be wondered at that the intensely religious, extremely uneducated and highly organized community of Moplahs should contain among them a few fanatics who took it into their heads that every 'kaffir' killed or converted was a stepping stone on their own path to heaven. A certain percentage of casualties should be so counted. One can and should, however, state explicitly that the main force behind the rebellion was not fanaticism which was simply a by-product of the rebellion.

The following extracts from the official history of the Congress in Kerala, published by the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee in 1935, are revealing :

> Down to August 28th, when the battle of Pookottur took place, the British administration may be said to have ceased to exist in Malappuram, Thirurangadi, Manjeri, Perintalmanna — all these places were the fields of unrestricted activity of the rebels. Nobody resisted them, hence they had no need to resist anybody or to organize revolt against any body. Only Police Inspector, Chekkutty, a police Head Constable and a few men of the Nilambur Thirumulpad were murdered by the rebels at this stage. The statement of a witness cited by the prosecution itself says that *the behaviour of the rebels at this stage was not such as to frighten the ordinary people in any way...*
>
> *With the coming of the military, the mentality of both the rebels as well as of the common people underwent a change.* The 'battle' of Pookottur and the clashes with the militaryat several other places disrupted the hitherto solid forces of the rebels; the loss of the personnel and the dangerous situation facing them made the rebels

desperate. The common people in their turn had to face a very difficult situation since, as in all wars, neutrality was dangerous. Those Hindus who did not give all cooperation to the military would be considered sympathetic to the rebels. The helpless Hindus, therefore, were sometimes forced to give information to the military regarding the where-abouts and movement of the rebels. This naturally created suspicion among the Moplahs who began to get furious against the Hindus. It was thus that the originally non-communal movement of a section of the common people was ultimately transformed into a communal Moplah rebellion. (Emphasis added)

V

It was natural for the people of the country with a feudal-colonial economy and caste-ridden society to start their struggle for democracy in the form of a struggle for the equality of all castes and from there to go forward to the struggle for political and economic democracy. This, as we have seen, was the course taken by the people of Kerala in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

But, since the people were led by a class that was not prepared to go as far as their followers wanted them to go—by the national bourgeoisie which was not prepared to smash the feudal-colonial economy and replace it by an economy that would satisfy the needs of the people, but only to make such adjustments in the economy as would help them to get a bigger share in the fruits of exploitation, the movement received a severe setback. The years after 1921 may be said to be a period of reaction as far as the national democratic movement is concerned.

Although the Congress-Khilafat-tenancy movement in Malabar started as a movement of all communities, it was transformed into a communal movement mainly because the national (bourgeois) leadership of the movement refused to direct and lead it aganist imperialism and feudalism. The result was not only that imperialism could crush the movement, not only that South Malabar, the scene of the 1921 rebellion, was put under

martial law for some time and then under severe police rule; not only that over 20,000 peasants were sent to jail for long terms and to the Andamans; but that the very atmosphere of the country was vitiated by the poison of communalism.

The Hindu intelligentsia of Malabar started going more or less in the same direction as their counterparts in North India. The Arya Samaj and other Hindu communal organizations came and started their work in Malabar, first by way of affording relief to Hindu refugees fleeing from the areas of the rebellion, then by reconverting those Hindus who had been forcibly converted to Islam by the rebels and ultimately going to the extent of converting Muslims to Hinduism. The Muslim intelligentsia were terror-stricken because of the post-rebellion repression that they had to go through but were nevertheless extremely indignant. They could do nothing but be resentful for the time being, but that was by itself sufficient for the creation of an atmosphere ideally suited for communal squabbles.

It is true that this did not lead to the communal tension and communal riots so familiar to the people of North India. The Shudhi, the Sanghtan, the anti-cow-slaughter and anti-music before mosques campaign, etc., did not catch the imagination of the Hindus here as they did in North India. The main reason is that the Hindus here are so caste ridden, the caste rules regarding their mutual social relations are so rigid, that it is extremely difficult to create a real sense of Hindu solidarity. The 'low-caste' people felt more at home with Muslims and Christians than with their own co-religionists of the higher castes. The caste Hindus in their turn could not see why, if they could interdine and intermarry with low-caste Hindus, they could not do the same with Muslims and Christians. As a matter of fact, there was a movement among certain 'low-caste' people for their wholesale conversion into any other religion, since that would give them greater social equality. The Arya Samaj, the Hindu Mahasabha, etc., could not therefore take deep roots in Kerala.

This, however, does not mean that there was no Hindu and

Muslim communalism. In fact, the Malabar Congressmen themselves were split into Hindus and Muslims. When they started reorganizing the Congress in the post-rebellion years, there were virtually two centres of the Congress — one Hindu and the other Muslim — each having its own paper, *Mathrubhumi* and *Al-Ameen*. It is also remarkable that some Hindu Congressmen were themselves the organizers of the Hindu Mahasabha. The gulf between the two groups was so wide that, though each claimed to be a group of Congressmen, one could not cooperate with the other even in organizing the Congress. It was only long after the Muslim League started becoming strong, and even then not to any considerable extent, that the gulf was bridged.

The main form of communalism, however, was caste against caste, rather than Hindu versus Muslim. The non-caste Hindus of Malabar like the Tiyyas were organized against the Congress on the plea that the Congress was an organization of caste Hindus, particularly Nairs. Demands of these backward or untouchable castes for special consideration with regard to educational facilities, sharing of government jobs, etc., were pushed to the foreground in place of the national demand of freedom from imperialism. The British administrators were even looked upon as 'friends of the backward and untouchable castes', and sincerely anxious to protect them from the oppression of caste Hindus. The unity of castes and communities that had been brought about in the years of the anti-imperialist upsurge was thus disrupted.

This phenomenon was particularly strong in the states part of Kerala where there was no political movement of any sort. Malabar did have, at least nominally, a skeleton Congress organization which held its meetings and conferences, enrolled members and carried on other political activities, including participation in elections. (In the election both to the Madras and Central Legislatures, Congressmen contested as Swarajist candidates in the post-1921 years.) What is more, Congress committees also participated in the campaign for the enactment of tenancy legislation. The states part of Kerala did not have even this much of political activity, since the policy of the

Congress continued to be one of non-interference in the internal affairs of Indian states. The result was that politics in the states revolved entirely around castes. Almost every election that took place in Travancore and Cochin was fought on the lines of which caste is to have its representatives in the legislature.

It is true that caste conflicts had taken place even in the pre-1921 years but the caste conflicts of those earlier years had the character of conflicts between the masses of slowly-awakening 'low-castes' and 'higher castes' that were opposing them. The conflicts of the post-1921 years, on the other hand, had the character of conflicts between the upper class elements of various castes for their respective shares in government jobs and other spoils of office. For example, there was the Nair-Ezhava conflict in Central Travancore in the year 1905 which had its origin in the hostility of certain aristocratic Nair families to the admission of Ezhavas into government schools. There was also the Nair-Pulaya conflict near Quilon in 1915 which had its origin in the hostility of the Nair gentry to the movement for dress reform among Pulaya women There was on the other hand, the Nair-Christian electoral conflict in Central Travancore in 1922 which had its origin in the competition between Nairs and Christians in the matter of starting a school.

This change in the character of caste conflicts can be seen in the character of the caste organizations as well. While, in the first stage of their development, they more or less concentrated on social reform, they began, in the second stage, to put greater emphasis on getting their share of government services, seats in the legislatures, etc. Even 'higher' castes like the Namboodiris, who had a disproportionately greater pull in the bureaucracy but were backward in the matter of modern education and hence in government service, began to speak in terms of shares in government services.

The manner in which the national bourgeoisie reacted to these developments was in keeping with its betrayal of the great national upsurge. It dismissed these caste conflicts and caste organizations as nothing but the false slogans of imperialism. It refused to see that these caste conflicts had a real basis in

socio-eonomic reality and that these conflicts would continue to burst out again and again so long as this socio-economic reality continued.

After all, the leaders of the caste organizations are able to mobilize the masses belonging to their respective castes not because these masses are inherently caste-minded but because the oppression and exploitation of classes is concealed behind the cover of caste inequality. Caste conflicts can, therefore, be ended only if the national movement concentrates its fire against the common enemy of the over whelming majority of the people of all castes — imperialism and feudalism. If only the leadership of the national movement had taken a clear and consistent stand against imperialism and feudalism and to that end championed the particular demands of 'lower castes' for social equality, it could have rallied the masses belonging to all castes behind the banner of nationalism.

It was just this that the national leadership refused to do. Not only did it betray the revolutionary struggle of the masses for freedom from imperialist oppression and exploitation, it also looked with hostility at the movement of the 'lower' castes for social equality. Special facilities for the 'backward' castes to enable them to catch up with the 'higher' castes in respect of education, employment, etc., were, in their eyes, 'caste separatism' and not an integral part of the struggle for equality and democracy. The masses belonging to the 'lower' castes therefore could not be roused to action under the flag of nationalism; they were roused instead by the separatist slogans of the leaders of caste organizations.

VI

The reaction that set after the 1921 rebellion was enough to check the growth, but not to quench the fire of anti-imperialism that had been set alight in the years 1919-21. Although much reduced in number, a band of Congressmen carried on the minimum organizational work of the Congress; khadi, Hindi, anti-untouchability and other items of 'constructive' work also helped to keep the flame of anti-imperialism alive. People responded to these activities magnificently,as was witnessed at Vaikom (in

Travancore) where a satyagraha launched to establish the right of untouchable castes to walk through the road adjoining the temple, brought hundreds of young men and women into activity.

The significance of these post-1921 activities was that they kept the flame of anti-imperialism alive and prepared the ground for the next wave of struggle. For, it was as the further development of these activities that the new and far bigger round of struggle started all over Kerala. While the Kerala Provincial Political Conferences of the years 1922-27 were routine affairs which only helped to keep the Congress organization alive, the Conference that was held in 1928 marked a turning point in the history of our anti-imperialist movement. The lively discussion that took place at the Conference on the question of Dominion Status versus Complete Independence was an indication that new and vital elements had started emerging inside the Congress. Following as this did the hostile demonstrations which greeted the arrival of the Simon Commission on the soil of India, it showed that the youth of Kerala were not lagging behind their brethren in other parts of India.

This new awakening of the youth of Kerala manifested itself in the 1930 civil disobedience movements as well as in the 1931 satyagraha at Guruvayoor for the right of the untouchables to enter the temple and worship there along with caste Hindus. The younger generation of Congressmen beat down the opposition of the older ones to the inauguration of civil disobedience in Malabar and forced them to start it. Youth from all parts of Kerala assembled at Calicut, marched to Payyanur, the venue of the illicit manufacture of salt, a magnificent anti-imperialist rally, and made the civil disobedience at Payyanur a success. Many were the heroic actions that they organized in the ten months of 1930 and the year-and-a-half of 1932-33. So too, were the march to Guruvayoor, the two-month-long satyagraha at the gates of the temple, the militant turn given to the satyagraha at one stage of the struggle and the countrywide propaganda in its support. It was becoming increasingly clear that the youth of Kerala was coming into its own.

Had it been left to the bourgeois leadership of the national movement to lead the struggle as it liked, this wave of anti-imperialist struggle would have been disgracefully betrayed like the earlier 1919-21 wave. For, the plan of campaign worked out that leadership left nothing to chance and made all guarantees that the participants in the movement would not resort to revolutionary forms of struggle. When it was found that, despite these guarantees, the rank and file Congress volunteers were seeking out new and militant forms and struggle, the leadership successfully diverted the whole struggle from anti-imperialism to anti-untouchability.

In Kerala, too, the Guruvayoor temple-entry satyagraha, which in its initial stages was a campaign for rallying the masses of the untouchables and progressive caste Hindus, was very soon converted into a movement which diverted the energies of dozens of democrats from the anti-imperialist struggle. The so-called Harijan Uplift movement initiated at the end of 1932 and the Council-entry programme launched in 1933 were calculated to put a stop to the militant anti-imperialist actions.

Everything, however, was not left in the hands of the bourgeois leadership. The 1930-32 struggles were started at a time when new forces had already appeared on the political horizon. The student and youth movements that had come into being in the rest of India began to spread in Kerala. The self-sacrifcing revolutionary ardour of Bhagat Singh and his comrades inspired the Kerala youth. Vague ideas of socialism and communism, stories of what happened and what was taking place in the Soviet Union, had started catching the imagination of the people. Rank and file Congressmen in Kerala came into close contact with the left leaders of the Congress like Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose and Vithalbhai Patel as well as revolutionaries from Bengal, Bihar, U. P. and Punjab, many of whom were lodged in the various jails of Madras Presidency.

All this led to the development of a well-defined group of revolutionary Congressmen who, though organizationally within the Congress, were ideologically outside the Gandhian leadership. The result was that, by the time of the abandonment of

mass civil disobedience and the adoption of the Council-entry programme, the majority of rank and file Congressmen in Kerala had already taken a definite turn to the left. Not only were Yuvak Sanghs, Youth Leagues, etc., organized in various parts of the province but the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee that came to be organized in 1934 had a majority of leftists. These leftist Congressmen, moreover, declared themselves socialists and organized the Congress Socialist Party.

While these developments were taking place inside the Congress, revolutionary forces of more or less the same character were taking shape inside the ranks of caste organizations. Despite the efforts made by the leaders of these organizations to shelter their own ranks against the new forces, radical transformations had started taking place among them. Not only did anti-imperialism penetrate these caste organizations, so that sympathy for political movements became a marked feature of every one of them; simultaneously, an ideological revolution was taking place in their ranks. Rationalism, atheism, materialism and, through these, sympathy for the land of communism —this was the process through which the radical rank and file of the caste organizations came to accept socialism at the same time as rank and file Congressmen were groping towards it through their own political experience.

The result was that by the time a definite left wing took shape inside the Congress, a left wing had also taken shape inside the caste organizations. The sense of unity and solidarity that each felt with the other was one of the factors which guaranteed that the new revolutionary forces that emerged in nineteen-thirties would draw into their fold all that was really democratic and radical in the social reform and political wings of the national movement.

VII

One of the characteristic features of the new wave of anti-imperialist struggles was that the struggle for political democracy had started in the states part of Kerala also. The states people's movement that took shape in other Indian states spread

to Travancore where a State People's Conference was held in 1928. This may be said to be the beginning of a movement for political democracy with the central slogan of responsible government. The youth of Travancore and Cochin who had to leave their states to participate in the 1930-32 civil disobedience movements were as much moved by the need for democracy in the states as by the need for the complete independence of India.

The direct demand for responsible government, however, remained confined to a comparatively narrow circle of progressive democrats until the specific internal politics of the states forced the issue of political democracy. This happened in a peculiar way in Travancore.

When a new instalment of constitutional reforms was introduced in 1932, the communal organizations of Christians, Ezhavas and Muslims opposed that part of it which dealt with representation in the legislature. Their contention was that the quantum and method of representation were such that the Nairs were favoured at the expense of the other communities. In order, therefore, to organize effective opposition to these constitutional reforms, they formed themselves into what was called the Joint Political Congress. Since the three communities together constituted about seventy per cent of the population of the states and since they adopted more or less the same technique to fight these constitutional reforms as the Indian National Congress did against the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms in 1919-21, their campaign unleashed a tremendous mass force. Their boycott of the reforms—of course, they did not call it 'boycott' but 'abstention', but it meant the same thing—was as effective as the Congress boycott of the Montague-Chelmsford reforms.

Hence, in spite of its outwardly communal character, radical nationalists welcomed the movement as the first mass political movement in Travancore. It was this movement, together with the repression which the government launched against it, that led to the subsequent inauguration of the Travancore State Congress with its central slogan of responsible government.

Though not of such an intense mass character as in Travancore, Cochin too had its movement for resposible government; the leaders of certain communal organizations joined with certain Congressmen to form what was called the Cochin State Congress. The main factor that contributed to this development was the hostility engendered in certain sections of the capitalists of the state to the policy of the then Dewan of Cochin, Sir Shanmugham Chetty, which favoured capitalists from outside the state; the well-known electricity agitation in Trichur---the agitation started by capitalists against the agreement entered into by the state government with an outside firm for the electrification of Trichur, was as militant and had as much of a mass character as the Joint Political Congress of Travancore; the only difference was that, while the former was confined to a town, Trichur, the latter was an all-state movement, though the former was more national since it was an all-communities affair as against the latter which was confined to some. This agitation of native capitalists against capitalists from outside the state brought the powerful Christian community of Trichur on the side of the struggle for political democracy.

The most significant fact of all in the 1930 wave of anti-imperialist struggles, the fact that gave the anti-imperialist movement a qualitatively higher character, was that a new class emerged on the political arena—the industrial working class. It was the working class of Alleppey that first organized itself in the early 1920s. It was no narrowly-economist or trade unionist organization that they built up for themselves; one of the earliest annual conferences of their union passed a resolution demanding responsible government in the state. It should be noted that this political resolution of the Alleppey working class was adopted long before the Travancore State Congress was born and even before the Joint Political Congress was formed. Apart from this collective political action of the working class of Alleppy, the workers of Calicut, Cannanore and other centres also participated in political action, many of them individually joining or helping the civil disobedience movement.

It was not, however, till 1934-35 when a series of industrial strikes took place at Cannanore, Calicut, Feroke, Trichur,

Cochin, and Alleppey that the working class of Kerala got itself organized as a class. Out of these strike actions of the industrial working class arose those characteristically proletarian class organizations, the trade unions, organizations which are at once an indivisible part of the general anti-imperialist movement and independent of the bourgeois leadership of the national movement. Significantly enough, this crystallization of the working class movement of Kerala into a definite organization, the All-Kerala Trade Union Congress whose first (all-Kerala) conference was held at Calicut in May 1935, coincided with the formation of the Congress Socialist Party whose all-Kerala conference was also held at Calicut in the same week.

There was thus to be seen, in 1934-35, that combination of the working class movement with socialist consciousness which, as Lenin pointed out, would alone guarantee the successful completion of the struggle for full democracy and gave the way for the subsequent struggle for socialism. This, therefore, may be considered to be the beginning of a new and significant stage in the democratic movement of our country—the stage of the struggle fo rproletarian hegemony.

8

The Working Class In The Anti-Imperialist Movement

Elections to the Central Legislative Assembly were ordered by the then Governor-General, Lord Willingdon in 1934 with the firm belief that the Congress had been weakened by the 1930-33 repression. The actual result, however, showed that the opposite was true. Like in most other parts of the country, the Congress candidate from the Malabar-cum-South Kanara general constituency secured over 80 per cent of the votes polled. It was thus made clear that, far from weakening, the Congress had become a real people's organization with firm roots among the masses.

This was made still more clear in the subsequent general elections to the Provincial Legislatures (1937) when all the Congress candidates in the general constituencies in Malabar secured overwhelming majorities and several candidates opposing the Congress forfeited their deposit. Particularly significant is the fact that all the candidates put up or supported by the Justice Party and who claimed to represent the 'backward castes' were defeated. The hold of pro-British leaders over the masses belonging to those castes was clearly weakening, if not breaking.

While the Congress was thus emerging as the undisputed leader of the democratic people of Malabar, an internal crisis was slowly developing within the Congress organization itself. The new revolutionary forces of left nationalism and socialism that had taken shape in the course of the 1930-32 struggle had crystallized into a definite socialist group within the Congress

challenging the Gandhian leadership. No sooner was the Congress re-organized in June-July 1934, that a bitter struggle started between this left and socialist group and the Gandhian leadership inside the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee.

As has already been mentioned, the KPCC of 1934-35 had a leftist majority. It was, therefore, natural that the Provincial Political Conference which that committee organized in May 1935 should have had on its agenda a series of resolutions giving expression to revolutionary sentiments. Resolutions demanding the abolition of Indian native states, drawing attention to the growing danger of war, supporting the immediate demands of workers and peasants, etc., were moved at the conference. This led to heated controversy, since the Gandhian right-wing leaders of the Congress stoutly opposed all these resolutions. That controversy, at the end of which the leftist resolutions were adopted by majority, was characteristic of the subsequent years : the entire Congress organization in Malabar was the arena of a fierce struggle between the right and left wings in which the left wing was stronger.

The left wing, however, did not confine itself to activities within the Congress. While working inside the Congress to bring about radical changes in the programme and methods of work of the organization, it also carried on independent work of agitation, propaganda and organization among workers, peasants, students, teachers, etc.

For the first time in the history of Malabar, trade unions started functioning in all the industrial towns. All of them were led by one or other of the organizers of the newly-formed socialist group in the Congress. There was systematic coordination between the socialist-led Congress Committees (beginning with the Provincial Congress Committee itself) and the trade unions. The 1934-35 strike wave among the industrial workers was thus led and organized in such a way as not only to set up industrial trade unions but to link up their day-to-day activities with the agitation, propaganda and organisation geared to rallying the working class for the anti-imperialist united front.

Work among the peasants was also started. A basis for it was laid with a critique of the Malabar Tenancy Act passed in 1930 and demands for amendments to it. It has already been mentioned that the early tenancy movement was concerned more with the demads of the *kanamdars* (who are a privileged minority among tenants) than with the demands of all tenants. The Tenancy Act that was passed in 1930, therefore, did not give any real relief to the majority of tenants; the fixity of tenure granted to *Verumpattamdars* was subject to so many conditions, and the rate of 'fair rent' fixed for them was so high, that their position remained more or less the same as before. The demand was, therefore, formulated that all tenants including *Verumpattamdars* should get full and real fixity of tenure, that the rate of 'fair rent' should be reduced and that other pro-tenant changes should be made in the provisions of the Act. In Malabar, taluk and local peasants conferences were held to formulate these and other demands and peasant organizations at district, taluk and local levels were formed. The socialist-led Congress Committees and Congress Conferences also lent support to these demands. Thus was brought about that coordination of the independent class organization of the peasantry with Congress committees which laid the basis for a real anti-imperialist united front, with the peasantry as its main driving force.

One other class organisation that was characteristically part of the anti-imperialist movement of the period was the Teachers' Union. This was the organization of teachers in'aided' elementary school—a type of school in which the teachers were, and continue to be, literally at the mercy of the management. Living wage, security of service and other demands of these teachers became the slogans that linked the teachers with the industrial workers in the towns and with the peasents in the villages. Coming as they did from among the peasants, the teachers had a real interest in the amendment of the Tenancy Act and other peasant demands; at the same time, being subjected to the similar exploitation as the industrial workers (wage-labour), they were as interested in the demand, struggles and organizations of the industrial working class. The Aided Elementary School

Teachers' Union, therefore, took more or less the same organizationl form and adopted a similar form of struggle (strike as did the working class; while, being the most enlightened section of the rural poor, they provided the most active and capable cadre for building up the peasants' organizations. In fact, it was the combination in one and the same person of the office-bearer of the village Congress committee, the leader of the Teachers' Union and the organizer of the Karshaka Sangham that made the anti-imperialist movement strike deep roots in the countryside.

These mass organizations, together with student and youth organizations, reading rooms, night schools, etc , helped the leftists in the Congress in their struggle against the rightists. Whatever manipulations the right-wing Congressmen might carry on at the top, they could not do anything below. The new constitution of the Congress, enforced in 1935, with its restrictions on the number of members of the KPCC and with various provisions like the manual labour clause, enabled the rightists to capture the KPCC. Lower committees like the district Congress Committees as well as most of the taluk and village commi ttees however, remained under the control of the leftists, so that these Congress committees became : nother forum to articulate the class demands of the toilers, a training ground to get active cadres from the working class and peasantry.

The right wing leadership resisted this type of revolutionary activity. With the majority that they manipulated to secure in the KPCC when the 1935 constitution of the Congress came into force, they dissolved several district, taluk and local Congress committees and suspended some Congress organizers in 1936. They were deliberately provoking a split in the organization, since it was only through a split that they could dominate the Congress. But the approaching general elections to the provincial legislatures under the new constitution, together with the fact that all the active and selfless cadres of the Congress belonged to the left, made the Congress President and the Working Committee revoke these disciplinary actions: by the time the elections were over, the position of the leftists had become so strong that the KPCC itself came under their leadership.

A big decisive factor in this last development—the restoration of the leftist majority in the KPCC—was the close cooperation between the nationalist Muslims and the socialist-led Congress of Malabar. It has already been mentioned that the Congress in the post-1921 period was virtually split into two—a Hindu group and a Muslim group. Muslim Congressmen had, for some time after the 1930-32 struggle, even kept themselves out of active political work. The emergence of the socialist-led leftists as a definite group fighting the right wing gave hope to these nationalist Muslims who began to work in cooperation with them It was this alliance between the socialist-led Congressmen and nationalist Muslims that helped to reduce the rightists to a minority within the KPCC; it was this again that took the kisan and teachers' movement into the Muslim-majority areas of Malabar.

The new KPCC with the socialist-led leftists and nationalist Muslims together in the majority carried the mass movement several steps forward. The gigantic political campaigning of the period of the general elections, followed by the enthusiasm roused by the formation of the Congress ministry, had already led to a tremendous mass upsurge: the trade unions, kisan sabhas, student unions, teachers' unions, etc., grew as never before; the Trade Union Demands Declaration Day (September 19, 1937) witnessed the biggest rally of the working class in Calicut and Cannanore. It was, however, after January 1938 (when the KPCC came under leftist leadership) that the Congress in Malabar became a real organ of people's struggles. One of the first things that the new, socialist-led KPCC did was to organize provincial, district, taulk and village level volunteer camps through which, in the course of a year, nearly 3,000 volunteers were given physical and political training. These 3,000 volunteers, headed by taulk and district level captains, formed the backbone of the 500 or so village Congress committees for the regular functioning of which systematic organizational steps were taken by the KPCC

This unprecedented organizational work roused the peasantry of North Malabar, gave them confidence in their own organized strength and led them towards the first mass peasant

struggle in the history of Malabar—the 1938-39 campaign against feudal levies. That campaign was so strong that the landlords and bureaucrats raised the cry of anarchy. And 'anarchy' it was to those who wanted to maintain feudal domination intact: not only did the peasants withhold the payment of rent for the season (winter 1938-39), till a solution was found to the question of levies; they also resorted to that traditional weapon of the peasantry—social boycott—against the landlords and their stooges.

This act of the peasantry so enraged the landlords, bureaucrats and right-wing Congressmen that they demanded prompt punitive action against the peasants. The KPCC and lower Congress committees, however, declared themselves on the side of the fighting peasants and urged upon the Congress ministry to bring about an amicable settlement. The result was that the Congress ministry appointed a committee to go into the question of amending the existing Tenancy Act; the leaders of the kisan movement on their part advised the peasants to pay rent to the landlords. The latter, however, were forced to drop the demand for feudal levies.

The Congress organization in Malabar in 1938-39 was thus a model of an anti-imperialist united front in action. On the one hand, it helped the working class and its allies in revolutionary struggle—the peasants and the petty bourgeoisie—to organize themselves and their struggles; on the other hand, it rallied all these revolutionary classes and their organizations behind the common slogans of the anti-imperialist movement.

It, however, roused the anger of the right-wing Congressmen who lost no opportunity to run down this Congress organization. They went so far as to non-cooperate with the Congress organization in the 1940 elections to the District Board, resulting in the defeat of several Congress candidates. Since, however, the new District Board had a majority of Congressmen with a few Socialists also in it, the Adviser's regime that came to power at the end of 1939 took the first opportunity to dissolve it.

It is significant that, while the Adviser's regime dissolved the District Board in which Socialist-led leftists shared power, the

Congress Working Committee dissolved the KPCC itself. A Socialist-led Congress organization even in a corner of the country was a hindrance to the carrying out of the anti-struggle (individual satyagraha) line which the Congress leadership was then pursuing. With this dissolution of the Socialist-led KPCC and with the intense war-time repression against the leftists, the internal struggle between the rightists and the leftists in the Congress took a new turn.

II

The emergence of the working class and socialist movement began earlier in the states part of Kerala than in Malabar. Apart from the Alleppey Labour Union, whose formation and adoption of a resolution advocating responsible government have already been referred to, there was the Karshaka Thozhilali (Peasant and Worker) Movement in Kodungalloor in 1933. This movement demanded the scaling down of agrarian debts and took the form of mass satyagraha. A Communist League had also been formed in Trivandrum in 1931-32. Hence, when the trade union and socialist movements came to be organized in 1934-35 on an all-Kerala scale, they were not confined to Malabar. They were, unlike the earlier Congress movements, really all-Kerala movements. New trade unions and socialist groups were formed in Trichur, Cochin and other industrial centres of Cochin and Travancore, while the existing Alleppey Trade Union came to be linked with the all-Kerala movement.

One of the major activities of these socialist groups was to work within the democratic movement for responsible government and, to this end, agitate for the reversal of the Congress policy of 'non-interference in the internal affairs of Indian states'. The Cochin and Travancore Political Conferences were held in 1937 which urged on the Congress Working Committee to allow the Congress organization in the states to carry on political activity and not confine itself to 'constructive work'. When, however, the Haripura Congress adopted its well-known resolution on the formation of independent states people's organizations, an organization called the Cochin Congress was formed in Cochin, while the leaders and organizers of the Joint Political Congress in Travancore State formed, together with

other national democratic politicians, the Travancore State Congress. Both had, as their central slogan, responsible government under the Maharaja.

The course of development of these two organizations was different because the policies pursued by the two governments differed. The Government of Travancore headed by the dewan Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer made it clear that it would not allow any agitation for responsible government, as that slogan was a challenge to the authority of the Maharaja. The State Congress came to clash with the government within a few weeks of its formation and had to start a civil disobedience movement within six months. The Government of Cochin took a different attitude and declared that it had no objection to responsible government and that, on the other hand, responsible government was its own goal. Since, however, that goal could not be realized immediately the government argued, it was introducing an instalment of constitutional reforms, widening the franchise and transferring one department—the department of rural development—into the hands of an elected and responsible minister. This gave a handle to rightist leaders of the Cochin Congress to sabotage the development of the organization on militant lines. They decided to accept the ne w instalment of reforms, made their representative agree to the ministership and then began to cooperate with the government.

Because of the open hostility of the Government of Travancore to any movement with responsible government as its aim, the leadership of the Travancore State Congress could not pursue such an avowedly compromising policy. But they did their utmost to avoid direct mass action to enforce the democratic demand. It was the socialist-led Youth League which took the initiative in starting direct action; the State Congress Working Committee had to follow suit.

Thus was started that glorious mass action which is known as the 1938 State Congress struggle which was far more extensive than the 1921 Malabar movement : while the latter was by and large confined to certain taluks of Malabar, the 1938 Travancore movement embraced the whole state of Travancore.

The difference between the 1921 Malabar movement and the 1938 Travancore movement, however, consisted in the qualitatively higher character of the latter, for, one of the characteristic features of the Travancore struggle was the part played by the working class of Alleppey under the leadership of the Socialist Party.

The 20,000 and more coir workers of the town of Alleppey and the two taluks of Ambalapuzha and Chertala declared a general strike not only to enforce their own partial economic demands but also to express solidarity with the State Congress demand for responsible government. The strike was so magnificently conducted that, for days together, Alleppey town and the surrounding industrial belt were in the hands of the workers. The one-lakh-strong rally at Alleppey on October 23, 1938, the militant resistance offered by the workers to the police, the firing that followed it and the arrest of over 500 leading cadres of the union – these were the first actions in which the working class was steeled for bigger and more glorious action of eight years latter, the famous Punnapra Vayalar of 1946. The conscious and effective leadership given to this strike action by the socialist leadership, particularly P. Krishna Pillai who personally led the organization of the strike, won the confidence of the Alleppey working class for the Socialist Party.

Together with the working class of Alleppey and the surrounding industrial belt the mass of students all over Travancore came into action even in the most remote corners of the state. The magnificent strike and demonstrations of students in colleges, high schools and even elementary schools were a sight unprecedented in the history of Kerala. This was one more instance of what had taken place in many colonial and semi-colonial countries—demonstrating the ability of the petty bourgeosie, particularly students, to play, on occasions, the role of the vanguard of the democratic movement. There is no doubt that, next only to the general strike of the Alleppey working class, the statewide student actions shook the state machinery to its very foundations.

Though not on such an all-state scale and hence insuffi-

ciently noticed by the State Congress leadership, peasants also came into action with their own forms of struggle. Just as in the 1921 Malabar rebellion, so in certain localities of Travancore, peasants prepared themselves to resist the military forces and, to this end, started cutting lines of communication. It is worth mentioning that the first persons to be executed on charges of waging war against the state in Kerala after the 1921 rebellion were the leaders of this movement which was, however, confined to a few villages.

The most significant feature of the 1938 Travancore struggle was the fact that the all-Kerala Socialist leadership gave direct organizational assistance to it. Not only did Krishna Pillai personally organize the Alleppey strike but he and other all-Kerala leaders of the Socialist Party were the brains behind the underground activities of the State Congress. Socialist cadres from all over Kerala were sent to Travancore to assist in the organization and regular functioning of the illegal apparatus of the State Congress. Above all, the two *jathas* which marched from Malabar to Travancore, particulary the first, under the leadership of A.K. Gopalan, electrified the entire State. Thus was born in action the unity of the democratic movement of Kerala—that, too, under the leadership of the working class and socialist movements—which was later to form the basis of the struggle for a democratic united Kerala.

All these features of the struggle in Travancore created as much panic in the bourgeois leadership of the all-India national movement as in the government headed by Sir C.P. As in the case of other militant mass actions, Gandhi found in the State Congress a deplorable element of violence; he objected to the fact that the State Congress leadership denounced not the government in general but the head of the Government, Sir C.P., personally. He said that it was wrong on the part of the State Congress leadership to have submitted a memorandum to the Central Government exposing the misdeeds of Sir C.P. and 'advised' the State Congress leadership to withdraw it. Since the penalty for non-compliance to this 'advise' would have been withdrawal of the moral support of the all-India leader-

ship to the State Congress struggle, the Working Committee of the State Congress was forced to withdraw the memorandum. This was the end of the great 1938 upsurge, since the people saw this action as nothing but surrender to the government.

The intense dissatisfaction among the rank and file at this surrender expressed itself in the formation of a definite left wing inside the State Congress—what was then called the Radical Group. Furthermore, the Youth League which had initiated the 1938 struggle reconsidered the entire political situation and decided to start a new struggle, the open reading of the with-drawn memorandum being its initial form. This received tremendous support from the people and even from a section of the State Congress leadership which, though forced to comply with Gandhi's 'advice' was at heart opposed to the withdrawal of the memorandum. However, it could not acquire the mass national character of the earlier struggle, since it was conducted by only a section of the nationalist movement.

This marked the beignning of a conflict between the left and the right within the Travancore State Congress, similar to that which gave rise to the Socialist Party in 1934 in Malabar. The socialist groups that had been functioning in Travancore till then were confined to certain towns and had become a major political force only in the industrial belt sur-rounding Alleppey. The 1939 struggle of the Youth League and the formation of the Radical Group, however, led to the trans-formation of left and socialist groups into a national political force, some of the best-known State Congress leaders (like K.C. George, M.N. Govindan Nair, T.V. Thomas, P.T. Punnoose, Srikantan Nair, etc.) being the leaders of these movements.

Left and socialist forces were also developing in Cochin. Although the 1938 instalment of constitutional reforms and its acceptance by the Cochin Congress successfully diverted the nat-ional movement into constitutional channels, discontent began to express itself. The socialists and other discontented democrats began to grope towards an alternative to the Cochin Congress and organized the Cochin State Praja Mandalam. They also took up the question of agrarian reforms, formulated the

demands of tenants in connection with the Tenancy Act in force and organized a statewide *jatha* to popularize these demands. Out of this campaign arose the first independent class organization of the peasantry in Cochin—the Cochin State Karshaka Sabha. The demands formulated and the type of organization formed were more or less on the lines of what had been done in Malabar. The organizers of the Praja Mandalam and Karshaka Sabha, it may be added, organized, in 1941 a defiance of the ban on a conference at a time when the leaders of the Cochin Congress were cooperating with the government in its 'war effort'.

The national upsurge of the nineteen-thirties and the role played in it by the working class and socialist movements were thus on a truly all-Kerala scale. For, though the form in which and the intensity with which they manifested themselves varied as between Malabar, Cochin and Travancore, they did not remain localized; the political national movement with a true all-Kerala leadership was thus slowly emerging. It was the organized working class guided by socialist ideology which stood at the head of this movement.

III

The main source of strength of the national upsurge of the nineteen-thirties was, as will be clear from the above, the fact that the new forces of the working class and the socialist movements were deeply rooted in the general democratic movement. The first generation of socialists in Kerala were in fact the very same people who had earlier carried the banner of nationalism and democracy. Socialism was to them a natural and logical development of revolutionary democracy; they could therefore successfully link up the class struggle of the industrial proletariat and its allies with the overall nationalist struggle.

This, however was at the same time, the great shortcoming of the working class and socialist movements as well as of the revolutionary democratic movement under their leadership. For, this meant that the various socialist groups in Kerala that were united under the banner of Congress Socialism, and the class movements that were growing under the Socialist leadership,

had not yet completely freed themselves from the ideological influence of the national bourgeoisie that was heading the national movement. The socialist cadres that were reared in Kerala had not carried on that struggle against the bourgeoisie and its ideology, Gandhism, which could alone have given them the proletarian class outlook towards the various problems they had to tackle.

We have seen that Socialism came to Kerala as a movement within the congress, as a party of Socialists working inside the Congress. That is, the approach of our Socialists was essentially that of Congressmen, extreme vacillation manifesting itself on those occasions when a firm fight had to be put up against the bourgeois leadership of the Congress. This does not mean that they did not put up a fight against the leadership of the Congress, *inside the Congress;* this, of course, they did and that was why they could build up the Congress itself on progressive democratic lines. This struggle inside the Congress, however, was so circumscribed by *the anxiety to preserve the internal unity of the Congress as an organisation* that they failed to carry on *a determined ideological struggle against Gandhism.*

The clearest example of this anxiety to preserve the internal unity of the national organization was seen in 1939-40 when the Socialist leadership advised the Travancore Youth League to withdraw the second civil disobedience movement which, as stated earlier, was started as a protest against the directive of Gandhi that the anti-Dewan memorandum be withdrawn. The Socialist leadership was so anxious to maintain the unity of the nationalist movement against the common enemy that it failed to see the importance of the discontent growing in the ranks of State Congressmen and to give shape to this discontent by forming a definite left wing.

This attitude of loyalty to the bourgeois leadership of the national movement affected Socialist work in the mass organizations as well. The trade unions, Karshaka Sanghams and other mass organizations that they built up were independent only in an economic sense, in that so long as it was a question of fighting economic battles, they acted independently of the

Congress. In fighting political battles, however, they did not emerge as independent mass organizations. The only example of a political general strike of the working class in Kerala in the years before the Second World War was the 1938 Alleppey strike organized in support of the State Congress struggle.

As for the peasantry, not only did the Karshaka Sangham fail to fight any political battles, but the very understanding of the Socialist leadership on the agrarian question was that the abolition of landlordism was a programme to be implemented only after Independence was established, the immediate prespective being one of waging partial struggles to secure partial demands. In other words, working class and peasant organizations were looked upon not as mass political organizations operating independently of, and if necessary in opposition to, the bourgeois leadership of the national movement, but as the vehicles through which the workers and peasants are mobilized behind that leadership.

The ideolgical root of such tailing of the bourgeoisie was the failure to see the crucial role of the peasantry under the leadership of the working class in the national revolution : the failure to see that agrarian revolution is the axle around which the wheel of the national revolution turns : that only the working class, headed by the Communist Party, can successfully lead the agrarian and hence the national revolution. Failure to see these basic elements of the strategy of Marxism-Leninism as applied to colonial conditions made our Socialists look upon the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie as the leading and decisive force in the revolution, the working class having little or no role.

This wrong approach to the strategy of revolution constituted a grave short coming in the further developement of the working class and socialist movement. It did not however, do any immediate harm. What was needed at that time was the building up of independent class organizations, the induction of the working class and peasantry into the anti-Imperialist movement and the organization of the left and socialist wing as a force against the right-wing in the Congress. These tasks of

the movement were, in the main, fulfilled, though it is indisputable that the correct approach to the strategy of revolution would have helped the better fulfilment of these very tasks.

The biggest asset of the pre-Second World War Socialist movement in Kerala was that, unlike the top right wing leadership of the Congress Socialist party, it was sincerely pro-Soviet and pro-Communist. As a matter of fact, it was the grand achievement of the First Five-Year Plan in the USSR, in the midst of the most severe economic crisis in the capitalist world, that attracted the working class and petty bourgeoisie of Kerala to the side of Socialism. It was, therefore, unthinkable for the young Socialist groups of Kerala to go anti-Soviet as the Masanis and Mehtas did.

The result was that, as the internal struggle inside the Congress Socialist Party acquired greater intensity, the ranks of the socialist movement in Kerala supported the pro-Soviet and pro-Communist left wing as against the anti-Soviet and anti-Communist right wing. Furthermore, a definite Communist nucleus was formed in Kerala in 1937 composed of some of the top-most provincial leaders of the Congress Socialist Party. The work of this group in the years 1938-39, together with the clash of Communist and Socialist policies which followed the outbreak of the Second World War, resulted in the complete transformation in 1940 of the Congress Socialist Party in Kerala into the Communist Party.

With this ends one phase of the history of the working class and Socialist movements in Kerala : the phase in which these movements remained more or less within the bourgeois national movement. It was only after the formation, in 1940, of the Kerala provincial and lower committees of the Communist Party, only after an illegal apparatus was set up to carry on the work of the Party, that the Socialists of Kerala ceased to look upon the Congress as the central organization through which they had to carry on their political activities. This organizational demarcation from the Congress arose out of a clash of policies between the Communists and the congress on the issue of India's role in the War. Hence this was the beginning of a phase in

which the working class and its political party started on an open ideological and practical struggle against the bourgeoisie and its leadership.

It will be appropriate here to refer to some works by anti-Communist authors which came out in the 1970s and which give a distorted view of the origin, growth and character of the Communist movement in Kerala.

The first is the autobiography of Minoo Masani which came out in 1977. The General Secretary of the Congress Socialist Party, Jaya Prakash Narayan he says, was so soft to the Communists that he put E.M.S. Namboodiripad in charge of the party organisation in Kerala, along with Ramamurthi in Tamil Nadu and Sundarayya in Andhra. All the three, he adds, were Communists who thanks to the lack of vigilnace on JP's part, were brought into leading positions in the CSP; they used their positions to turn the CSP into Communist Party in the respective states.

The fact of the matter however is that E.M.S. was elected the Joint Secretary of the All India Socialist Party along with Masani, Goray and Gautam at the very first conference of the Party in October 1934. None of the delegates who attended the Bombay Conference from Kerala (including E.M.S., Krishna Pillai and A. K. Gopalan) had in fact any contact with Communist party at that time. No question therefore arises of E.M.S, a Communist, being permitted to infiltrate into the CSP.

It was a year after the Bombay Conference of the CSP that the late Krishna Pilli and E. M. S had the first contact with the Communist Party of India through Sundarayya; it took almost two years after our first contact (in 1937) to form the first unit of the Communist Party of India.

During this whole period, the CSP leaders of Kerala worked as honest and loyal workers in the cause of Socialism, t develop the trade unions, Kisan Sabhas and other mass organisations as well as to develop the Congress as a radical anti-imperialist organistion in Kerala. It was this solid work in the urban and

rural areas of the state and not the mercy of Masani and Co., that made them leaders of the trade unions and the peasant movement, members of the AICC etc., making E. M. S the secretary of the KPCC and a member of the then Provincial Legislative Assembly of Madras as well.

Krishna Pillai, AKG and EMS in other words were Congress-Socialist leaders in their own right and not because JP or some body else "put them in charge," as Masani wants the people to believe. Why then did the Congress Socialists of Kerala join the Communist Party enbloc ? Because they were tremendously impressed by the gigantic strides taken by the Soviet Union in its (first) Five Year plan. They naturally came to the conclusion that the Socialist Revolution in Russia showed the revolutionaries of India, as the revolutionaries of the other countries, the path forward. They therefore joined the very first group of Congressmen who declare socialism to be their final objective-the group headed by JP, Masani and so on.

It may be added here that, if infact the founders of the CSP in Kerala had come into contact with the then illegal CPI before the formation of the All-India CSP, they might have probably plumbed for that party. For unlike Masaniand Co, they did not have the background of the British Labour Party whose 'Socialism' was infected with anti-Communist anti-Soviet prejudices.

Naturally therefore, the moment they got the first opportunity to contact the then illegal CPI, they entered into serious and business like discussions with them, and on weighing the merits and demerits of the policies laid down by the leaders of the CPI on one hand and Masani and Co, on the other, they found the former more correct. Their changeover from Congress Socialism to Communism was thus as natural as the earlier transition from Gandhite or Nehruite Congressmen into Congress Socialists.

Masani's anti-Communism, let us add, took him in a short time into the position of an employee to the Tatas, from there to the Congress and finally to the Swatantra Party of which he

was the founder: Which is more natural, from Congress Socialism to Communism or to the Swatantra Party via employment under the Tatas, one would like to know.

The second anti-Communist author to whom reference has to be made is V. M. Fic who in his ***Kerala : Yenan of India*** writes :

"The most outstanding feature of the activities of the Congress Communists was their introduction of Marxism into the ranks of the communal organisation. This move anchored the future communist party within the bodies of communal power, the very root of politics in Kerala. E. M. S. Namboodiripad and his other Brahmin collegues, organised the Namboodiri movement among young Brahmins; they published news papers and stage plays which pitted the young generation against the Hindu orthodox and traditional leadership. Hence, Communism was introduced into this elite caste, under the guise of a reformist movement.

"Similarly other Congress Communists injected Marxism into ranks of other Hindu castes. Some Congress Communists were influencial leaders of the Nair Service Society and introduced Marxism through programme linking it with social reforms. Among the third Hindu caste, the Ezhavas, Marxism was introduced through the work of its prominent Congress Communist leaders K. P. Gopalan, C. H. Kanaran, R. Sughathan and others".

Along with this work of "injecting Marxism into the communal organisation", the author goes on, the Communists organised the workers, the peasants, the Congress committees etc. He thus wants his readers to believe that the Communists Party in the earlier years of its development in Kerala gave the same place to the communal organisations as to the trade unions, Kisan Sabhas etc. and to the cultural front. He tries to substantiate this by resorting to a device which is totally alien to the standards of scientic integrity which should be expected of a scholar.

It has been shown in the foregoing pages that the modern democratic movement in Kerala had its beginnings in the orga-

nised movement for the reform of the family, property inheritence caste-based social relations etc., which have continued for centuries but which were recognised as out of tune with modern times. However, since the customs and manners, family and property relations etc. varied from caste to caste, the movement for modernisation had in the beginning a caste basis; the forward looking members of a particular caste organised themselves for reforming and modernising society.

As the movement developed however, realisation started dawning on the progressively thinking sections in every caste that separate movements for reform in the customs and manners of each caste has a common direction-modernisation of the family, marital relations, property etc. It was further realised that modernisation of society in its turn is integrally created with the political freedom of the country and the rights of the working people. Each caste organisation came to be divided between the conservatives who insisted on remaining confined to the limits of that particular caste and those who wanted their caste or community to become integrated with the general democratic movement for radical reforms.

As early as in the first half of the 1920s, a dynamic leader of the SNDP, T. K. Madhavan, for instance, advised his colleagues to take the help of Mahatma Gandhi in the very cause of advancing the position of the backward castes in society. Still another leader of the same caste organisation, K. Ayyappan, became one of the first initiators of the rationalist movement in Kerala; he began to popularise the idea of the working class, Socialism etc. Those who were with such nationalist, radical or socialist ideas in one community naturally clashed with their more conservative collagues in the same community. Every caste and communal organisation reflected these conflicting trends.

These developments, briefly described in the foregoing pages of this volume, have been dealt with in greater detail in the present author's *How I became a Communist*. These activities, like the activities of the Left Congressmen during the 1930-33 civil disobedience movement, undoubtedly helped the growth of

the radical and Socialist ideas among the people culminating in the formation of the Congress Socialist Party in1934. By that time however, those who took the initiative in forming the Congress Socialist Party and developing it into the Communist Party had lived down the period when they were radicals working in the caste and community-based organisations.

The initiative taken in 1934 to form the Congress Socialist Party showed that those who had earlier worked in the caste or communal organisations with a view to bringing about radical socio-cultural transformations, together with the leftist or radical elements within the Congress, came together as the organisers of the common people on class lines cutting across caste and communal barriers. As was noted by G. K. Lieten, the author of *First Communist Ministry in Kerala 1957-59*, "what seems to have been in the case in Kerala is that vested interest have been trying to keep the masses under the regressive ideology of communalist organisations who transmitted their followers to political parties of the same vested interests, while at the same time the progressive parties were organising the masses on democratic issues and in doing so made deep inroads into communal bases. Several developments indicate that the latter forces were getting the upper hand".

The 1930's in fact witnessed a furious battle between the conservative and radical elements in the caste organisations particularly in the Malabar area to which reference was made in the beginning of this chapter. The 1937 elections to the Madras Legislative Assembly from the Malabar area were fought between two forces—on the one hand, the Congress reflecting the national aspirations of the entire people, powerfully supported by the young Socialist Party which was fast developing into the Communist Party; on the other hand, the caste organisations of the Thiyyas and other 'backward' castes who denounced the Congress as "a caste Hindu organisation." Well known nationalists and pro-British elements from the same caste fought each other in a sizable number of constituencies. In every one of them, the pro-British elements supported by the Justice Party of Madras were defeated. While helping the

Congress in its electoral struggle against the pro-British candidates, of course, the Socialists carried the message of class struggle—the struggle of the poor and downtrodden against the exploiting classes cutting across and communal barriers. Carrying this message of struggle waged by the entire nation against the British rulers, and by the poor against the rich cutting across the caste and communal barriers, was the role played by the Congress Socialist - Communist organisers which Fic distorts into developing caste and communal organisations as part of Communist work.

Fic's distortion of reality does not end here. He extended it to the subsequent phases-the mid-term election that followed the liberation struggle of 1959. Adopting the notorious method of giving distorted statistical tables to prove his point, he says that the two general elections of 1957 were conducted on communal lines. But here again, one sees the utter lack of academic honesty and integrity expected of a research scholar. For, his tables XI and XII have the title "voting pattern" of Hindu and Christian conmmunities. He however gives only the number of *seats* secured party-wise and conmmunity-wise. How does the number of votes secured by a party candidate belonging to a particular conmmunity explain "the voting pattern"? Is it to be assumed that the voters in the constituency which returned a particular MLA belong to his community? How do you then explain the fact that four of the elected M. L. As belong to the Brahmin caste which in no constituteny is more than 1-2 per cent of the voters?

Anybody who knows anything about Kerala knows that, except in the present Malappuram district, there is no single constituency where any one caste or community is in the majority. Candidates belongtng to all castes and communities should have the support of people belonging to castes or communities other than their own, particularly in these days of heightened political consciousness, with no caste or community as a whole being rallied behind any single party. The biggest contribution madeby the political-electoral process in Kerala is that, in place of the single factor of caste or community as in the days before the present Indian constitution, the voters

are increasingly influenced by the class and political factors, or the economic and political policies to which parties and indivi dual candidates stand committed. Not even the Muslim Maulavis and the Christian Bishops who controlled the vote banks at one time can today sway the electorate in a big way. Even in 1957 and 1960, the grip of caste among the Hinduelecto rate had been broken; hence the 40 and 44 per cent votes polled by the Communist Party in 1957 and 1960 respectively.

Scholars of the type represented by Fic commit the error of trying to make the people believe that the political democratic process praceding and following the formation of the Communist Party has not made any difference in the influence exercised on the popular mind by the caste and communal consciousness. In fact however, the economic and political developments in the country, including the growth of political parties and the fighting organisations of the working people, are making the common people increasingly realise that it is the socio- economic and political life, rather than caste and communal ties, that shape their life and development. The Communist party with its philosophy and practice of class struggle has been playing an important role in taking this consciousness to the people.

Before we conclude this discussion, it is necessary to refer to a shortcoming in the otherwise scientific analysis made by Lieten. While correctly nailing down the errors committed by Fic and Co., Lieten fails to bring out the real significance of the emergence and development of the Communist Party. As was pointed out in the foregoing pages of this chapter, 1933-34 witnessed the entry of a new class, the modern working class, as an active political force in the state. A large number of factory workers, poor peasants, ill paid school teachers and other employees etc., had jumped into the Congress-led sathyagraha struggle of 1930-32. This had its impact on the new radical left wing in the Congress which arose in the years following the 1930-32 Civil Disobdieence Movement and which culminated in the formation of the C.S.P.

Leiten fails to note the significance of these developments. While describing the process of the development of the Communist

movement in Kerala through the evolution of two personalitise-A.K.G. and E.M.S.-he fails to note jhe dynamic role played by Krishna Pillai who is unanimously admitted to have been the key person in the process of forming the C.S.P. and transform-ingit into the Communist Party. Born in a family of pauperised poor peasants and having had no opportunity to have even school education, Pillai became the key figure in the Salt Satya-graha of 1930 exerting his influence on all his colleagues includ-ing A.K.G. and E.M.S.

Pillai however was only a symbol of the new-type political workers unknown to the earlier generation. Pauperised peasants, ill paid teachers, rural and urban wage-workers, middle class intelligentsia having no university degrees-this is the type that could never aspire to become the leaders of political parties before the formation of the C.S.P. in 1934. It was however from this very section that the overwhelming majority of the Congress Socialist-Communist cadres were drawn.

The birth of the Party therefore meant that, as opposed to the professional politician of the bourgeoisie who dominated Congress politics till then, politicians belonging to the new class were increasingly asserting themselves. The strengthening and development of the Communist Party in subsequent years meant that men and women belonging to this new class were becom-ing not only the leaders of political parties but MLAs, Ministers MPs etc. That was why the vested interests in the political and economic life in the state could not tolerate the emeragence of the Communist government in 1957.

V

The months immediately following the outbreak of the Second World War saw an intensification of the struggle between the left and the right inside the Congress. The left came out with a declaration that the War was an imperialist war and that therefore India should have nothing to do with it. The right on the other hand, said that the War was an imperialist war, since Britain had not accepted the independence of India, thus

implying that it would cease to be an imperialist war if India's status as an independent nation was accepted by Britain. From these conflicting characterizations of the war arose conflicting tactics - the leftist tactics of *unconditional resistence to an inherently unjust war* and the rightist tactics of *conditional support to that unjust war* or rather the tactics respectively of intensification of the mass struggle agains mperialism and bargaining with imperialism.

This struggle between the le t and the right was, in Kerala, not merely a continuation of what had been taking place in the pre-War years, a struggle between two groups inside the Congress. It was a struggle between the bourgeois leadership of the national movement on the one hand and the Communist Party that was emerging as an independent political party on the other. It meant further the adoption of certain forms of organization and methods of struggle that were never before known to the people of Kerala.

It was in January-February 1940 that at a series of meetings of the Congress Socialists it was decided that the Congress Socialist Party should be transformed into the Communist Party and that efforts should be made to implement the revolutionary plan of action chalked out by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India in its well-known document, *The Proletarian Path.* This was logically followed by the decision to set up the illegal apparatus of the Party not only because the Communist Party was a party under ban but also because Government had alrady started repression. Dozens of cases had been registered against leftists for having carried on anti-war and 'seditious' propaganda and many were already in jail. It was therefore thought necessary to keep out of jail the cadre necessary for the continuous functioning of the Party organization. The functioning of this organization for over two years—from the beginning of 1940 to July 1942 when the ban on the Party was removed—was a revealing experience for the people of Kerala in general and Communists in particular.

Initially however, the Communists were in a peculiar position: they were, on the one hand, an independent political party

functioning illegally and fighting the official policy of the Congress; on the other hand, they were the leaders of the provincial, district and lower units of the Congress organization. They had, on the one hand, to popularize the independent revolutionary political line of the Communist Party and, on the other, as Congressmen to keep within the limits set by the rules of satygraha as laid down by Gandhi. This conflict led to the call issued by them as Congressmen to observe an Anti-Repression Day (September 15, 1940) and to the simultaneous organization of militant resistance to the police on that day in their role as Communists. The well-known Morazha and Mattannaur cases which lead to the death sentence on K.P.R. Gopalan was a consequence of this militant action in the course of which two young comrades, Aboo and Chathukutty, laid down their lives. That day was therefore the first occasion on which militant resistance to the police was consciously organized by a political party as against the hitherto spontaneous resistance of the people.

This action therefore enraged the Government as well as the bourgeois leadership of the national movement. While the former unleashed a reign of terror in all areas where Communists were strong, the latter dissolved the KPCC and other Congress committees that had a majority of Communist-led leftists. The Communists had therefore necessarily to strengthen their illegal organization and to emerge before the people as an independent political party. That they did this successfully for nearly two years—October 1940 to July 1942—evoked the admiration of all genuine anti-imperialists in the province who began to look upon the Communist Party as the real leader of the anti-imperialist movement. It was thus during this period of illegality that the Commmunist Party, as a political party (and not merely as a group of good and hardworking Congressmen), became the leader of the anti-imperialist movement.

Meanwhile, however, the character of the War had changed: on June 22, 1941, the War ceased to be an attempt of antagonistic imperialist groups to repartition the world among themselves. It became a war decisive of the future of the Soviet Union and thus of the future of Socialism. globally. Since, however, this

change in the character of the War was of a type as could be perceived only by the class-conscious representatives of the proletariat, it led to a very complex situation. On the one hand the genuinely left petty bourgeoisie, although sympathetic towards the Soviet Union but could not, on that account alone, see any transformation in the character of the war so long as Britain continued to rule our country. The advanced elements among the working class, on other hand, felt that nothing should be left undone to defend the land of Socialism. Consequently the Indian Communists, after an initial leaning towards the former position, took in 1942 the stand that with the invassion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany, the war had become a People's War.

This made a basic change in the alignment of forces inside the national democratic movement in Kerala. The undisputed position of leadership over all genuine anti-imperialists which the Communists had enjoyed till 1942 was shaken. The right-wing bourgeois leadership of the national movement, which had always appeared to the rank and file anti-imperialists as compromising, now assumed the role of uncompromising fighters against imperialism, engaged in 'a last-ditch battle with the enemy'. The Communists who had always been regarded to be the fighters appeared compromisers. The hither solid unity of the left elements was thus broken, a section of the leftist allying themselves with the right-wing Congressmen. Anti-Communism became the hall-mark not only of the right-wing but sections of the left also. A new generation of anti-imperialists emerged which believe that the Communist Party was a paid agent of British Imperialism.

This development had disastrous consequences for working class and other mass organizations. The hitherto solid unity of trade unions, student organizations, etc. was broken. For the first time in the history of our working class movement, a bourgeois-led trade union movement, the National Labour Union, came into being; the Students' Congress began to rival the Students' Federation. On a far smaller scale than these two, and only in certain localities, the Peasants' Congress also started growing: rival organizations—this became the slogan of the anti-Communist section of the national movement.

The same thing happened to the Socialist movement. There had, till 1942, been no anti-Soviet, anti Communist bias inside the socialist movement in Kerala, thanks to the genuinely socialist convictions of the first generation of Socialists here. That was why not a single member of the Congress Socialist Party of Kerala dissented when it decided, in 1940, to transform itself into the Communist Party. The apparent conflict that however surfaced in 1942 between loyalty to the international proletariat and loyalty to our anti-imperialist movement created a new generation of socialists in Kerala who were as anti-Soviet and anti-Communist as the Masanis and Mehtas.

This was a very significant development because it showed that the apparent unity of the Congress leading the 1942 move ment contained with-in itself the seeds of future crisis. The desire to develop the national movement in the direction of socialism was as genuine for this generation of socialists as hatred for the Communists who oppeared to be standing in the way of 'the final struggle' against imperialism. Hence, as it began to become clearer, as the days passed, that the right-wing leaders were trying to come to an agreement with impe-rialism, the new 1942 generation of socialists began to get disil-lusioned with their-rightwing allies. This, as we shall see, was what led to the subsequent radicalization of the socialist ranks, to the formation of the Kerala Socialist Party and Revolutio-nary Socialist Party and to the possibility of a united front between them and the Communists.

Another factor complicating the political situation was the growth of the Muslim League as a major political force. Not since the days of 1920-21 was there such an awakening among the Muslim masses as in the War years : while in 1921 the Muslim masses were rallied behind the Congress, they were now rallied against it. Since the rallying of any section of the masses against the Congress was, in the eyes of Congressmen and anti-Communists leftists, a rallying of reactionary forces, they considered the masses behind the Muslim League to be as reactionary as the League leadership. The opposition of the Communists to this attitude, their advocacy of the slogan of

Congress-League unity. was another reason for the anti-Communists prejudice within the anti-imperialist movement

VI

Such a complex political situation required a high degree of political maturity on the part of the Communist Party. It was a question of linking up the national task of anti-Imperialism of the Indian proletariat with its international responsibility. It was again a question of fighting the pro-fascist sentiments growing among the anti-imperialist masses in such a way that, while it would effectively expose the conscious fascist agents, it would win over the majority of anti-imperialists. It was, moreover, a question of so working among the Muslim and non-Muslim masses as to help them to see the anti-democratic character or the stand taken by the leadership of both the Congress as well as of the Muslim League. It was, above all, a question of preserving and extending the unity of the trade unions, kisan sabhas, student organizations, etc., in such a way that the day-to-day demands of the mass of the people were secured without resorting to such forms of struggle as would help the conscious fascist agents.

There is no doubt that the Communist Party failed to show such a high degree of political maturity. Various mistakes were committed in assessing the anti-Imperialist content of the 1942 upsurge, in evaluating the significance of the birth of socialist and left elements in the wake of that struggle, in understanding the negative role of the Muslim League and its slogan of Pakistan, and in the tactics of struggle on working class and other mass fronts. The essence of these mistakes consisted in the underestimation of the national factor in working out the tactics of the revolution, in the failure to realize that Communist in a colonial country can fulfil their class tasks only if they take proper account of the national aspirations of the people which are the decisive political factor.

The main point, however, is not that these mistakes were committed and that the Party in consequence got temporarily isolated from the non-party mass of anti-imperialists. The main

and decisive point was that, in the first major political conflict with the bourgeois leadership of the national movement, the Communist party took its international class tasks as the axis of its political activity. It required a tremendous amount of political conviction and courage to swim against the current of national sentiment and openly take the international task as the main task. This was particularly so for the Communists of Kerala who, as we have seen, grew within the national movement and hence carried with them innumerable remnants of bourgeois nationalism. Yet they carried out this task as a united party; all the fervent hopes cherished by the opponents of the party, that it would either be forced to give up its slogan of People's War or would get disrupted, were dashed to pieces.

This, however, was not all. It was precisely during the 1942-45 period, when it had to contend with blind prejudice on the part of the majority of anti-imperialists, that the party grew into a mass political party. The weekly organ that the party started in 1942 very soon acquired the status of the leading political weekly in the Malayalam language. The successive calls for Party funds received a magnificent response, the amount collected in the 1942-45 period being over three lakh rupees. By every criterion of the organizational strength of any political party—such as funds collected from the people, the number as well as the quality of work of whole-time and part-time cadres, the circulation of the Party organ, the average sale of political pamphlets and other publications, etc.—the party recorded admirable success.

The main reason for this advance in the political influence and organizational strength of the Party was that, though its solgans on the national-political plane ran counter to the sentiments of a majority of anti-imperialists, its parctical day-to-day activity was eminently suited to the needs of the people : the Party took up all issues that affected the daily lives of the common people, such as food, cloth, sugar, kerosene, etc. Not only did the Party agitate for people's solutions to these problems, it also organized the people in Food Committees, Grow More Food Committees, etc. Through these activities, as well as through

the functioning of trade unions and karshaka sanghams, the Party sought to solve many immediate problems of the people.

It was because of these activities that, at the very time when mass organizations were being disrupted with the formation of national trade unions and students, congresses as well as Muslim labour unions and Muslim student federations, the number of organizations under Communist leadership and their mass membership grew as never before. The Party's efforts in the direction of developing a people's culture also led to a tremendous enrichment of the literary, artistic and scientific heritage of our people, thus drawing vast numbers of men and women of culture towards the Party.

A significant step taken by the Communist Party in the 1942-45 period was the formulation of the slogan of United Kerala. This had of course, been formally accepted ever since the Indian National Congress agreed to the principle of linguistic provinces in its own constitution and made the Malayalam-speaking areas a separate Kerala province for organizational purposes. But the fact that the major part of Kerala lay in the two Indian states of Cochin and Travancore, in whose 'internal affairs' the Congress was prohibited from 'interfering', virtually reduced the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee to a 'Malabar' Congress Committee. That was why, even when the Travancore State Congress and the Cochin Praja Mandalam brought these two states into the realm of active struggle for democracy, the national movement under bourgeois leadership remained split in three parts. Only with the emergence of the socialist movement and its transformation into the Communist Party did an all-Kerala political leadership emerge.

The Party, however, did not remain satisfied with this practical unification of the democratic movement throughout Kerala, but, through a series of articles and pamphlets raised the programmatic slogan of uniting all the homogeneous Malayalam-speaking-majority areas of the Madras Presidency and the states of Cochin and Travancore into one province without the two Maharajas. This, as we shall see, was a slogan which caught

the imagination of the people and created a very powerful mass movement for democracy.

Let us, however, state in anticipation that it was the Communist Party alone that gave an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal content to this slogan. The Party took the clear and forthright stand—(1) that the struggle for United Kerala is an indivisible part of the struggle of the people of India for the liquidation of imperialist rule; (2) that the struggle for United Kerala is also a struggle for ending princely rule and other remnants of feudalism, a struggle for the introduction of full and genuine democracy for the people; (3) that the boundaries of United Kerala are to be so drawn that all those contiguous areas of Madras, Travancore and Cochin where the Malayalam-speaking people are in majority shall be included; (4) that the struggle for United Kerala being the struggle for democracy, the common people of Kerala in alliance with their brethren in the neighbouring nationalities, are the decisive force in that struggle.

These basic premises of the Marxist interpretation of the national question in Kerala enabled the Party to carry on an ideological struggle against the various disruptive slogans advanced by the feudal, bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties with regard to United Kerala.

VII

Just as in 1934 the people belied the hopes of Lord Willingdon by rallying behind the Congress at the polls, so, too, in 1946 did they dash the hopes of the Congress leaders of seeing the Communist Party suffer an ignominious defeat. This was despite the slogan which Nehru himself raised: 'The Communists were on the other side in 1942'. Although the Congress, the Socialist Party and others like the INA, Netaji, etc., launched a vigorous offensive, political as well as physical, against the Party in the name of 1942, a sizable section of the electorate voted Communist in all areas where the Communists had become a force. It is true that they secured very few seats in the legislatures; the few they got were only in special labour constituencies and not in general constituencies. But the number of voters who braved the politi-

cal and physical offensive of other parties and expressed confidence in the Communist Party was an indication that the Communists had grown stronger and not weaker because of the bold, independent stand they took in 1942-45.

So far as Malabar was concerned, the Communists fought the Congress in five general constituencies which constituted two-thirds of Malabar. The votes polled by them in these five seats were on an average 25 per cent, the percentage in one of these (Chirakkal) was however as high as 44 per cent. Considering the heavy odds they had to contend with in fighting the Congress with its appeal to the traditions of 1942, this 25 per cent poll was indeed a creditable record.

The main thing, however, was not the size of the pro-Communist electorate but its political quality. For, the 25 per cent of the voters who recorded their votes in favour of the Communists were not merely voters exercising their franchise, but the vanguard of a new phase of mass political action – strikes, kisan and student struggles, etc. Though the Congress secured an overwhelming majority in the provincial legislature, it had to face not only gigantic people's movements for the satisfaction of immediate demands but also a determined struggle to smash imperialism. It was the Congress, not the Communists, that was to join 'the other side' in these struggles. The 25 per cent vote polled by the Communists in Malabar, together with similar votes polled by them in other parts of India, was an index of the Communist leadership in this post-war revolutionary upsurge.

Within a few months of the General Election of 1946, the workers of the South Indian Railway Labour Union launched their glorious general strike. Along with other parts of the Madras Presidency, Malabar participated in this. Not only did the railway workers of Malabar stand solidly behind the strike leadership, other sections of the workers and the general public also came out in solidarity actions in support of the strike. This was followed by the strike actions of the municipal workers, beedi and cigar workers, etc., as well as government employees.

Peasants, too, came into action; their campaign for the right

to cultivate fallow lands and to retain their own food requirements before complying with the demands of the government's procurement officials, was the first large-scale militant mass action of the peasantry in Malabar. Using Police and Malabar State Police, terror of unprecedented magnitude was unleashed by the Congress ministry to crush this wave of struggle. The Congress Government also resorted to detention without trial of the leaders of these struggles—a method of repression which had been universally condemned when resorted to by the British.

This phase of struggle had far more of a mass character in Travancore than in Malabar. The struggle in Malabar was made out to appear as if the Communists were trying to create trouble for the Congress Government which had the electoral support of the majorty of the people. Hence just as there was a section of the people who were firmly with these agitations, there was another section firmly opposed to them The struggles in Travancore, in contrast, were clearly directed against the universally hated government of Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer. The labour strikes, food rallies, students' actions and other mass actions in Travancore were launched in the midst of a political situation in which two slogans echoed throughout the state: 'Down with the American Model' (The reference is to the proposed new constitution for Travancore modelled on the American Presidential type of the executive as opposed to the British Parliamentary executive) and 'End the Dewan Rule'. The Communists being the most determined fighters against the American model and Dewan Rule, there was perfect cooperation between them and the mass of Congressmen including a section of the Congress leadership itself.

There was, however, one section of the Congress leadership in Travancore which panicked as much as did the government at this new phase of struggle. They could not, of course, openly support the government since the latter was as unbending as ever in its opposition to responsible government. They were, however, prepared to accept the new constitutional proposals of the government, provided some slight changes were made in them. What is more, they were totally opposed to the launching of any mass action against these proposals. The govern-

ment naturally tried to utilize this section to neutralize the entire Congress leadership and in order to isolate and crush the vanguard, the working class led by the Communist Party, and then to crush all opposition.

That the government succeeded in this for the time being is shown by the fact that when it raised the slogan of 'Communist violence and anarchy', the right-wing leadership of the Congress tacitly agreed with it. The concentration of the government's armed forces in the Ambalapuzha and Chertala taluks, the organization under its auspices of the landlord's goondas in the villages of the area, the series of arrests and other repressive actions resorted to by it—all this did not rouse the indignation of the State Congress leadership. But, when the working class under Communist leadership took defensive measures to meet this offensive, they denounced it as 'violence' and virtually supported the government's declaration of martial law. It was not the brutal firing and other official atrocities that enraged them, but the heroic resistance put up by the organized volunteers of the people led by the working class of Alleppey. The hostility of the Congress leadership to the heroic defence put up by the working class led by the Communist Party at Punnapra and Vayalar was the one factor which helped the government in beating back the people's movement for democracy.

The long term consequence of this betrayal by the Congress leadership, however, was not what either the government or the Congress leadership had bargained for. Though confused for the time being, the people in general began gradually to see that what was crushed Ambalapuzha and Chertala taluks was not merely the working class and its political party but the main force of the democratic movement. For, they saw that it was after Punnapra and Vayalar that the government, Sir C,P., raised the slogan of 'Independent Travancore' with no responsible government. The people, therefore, began to organize themselves for a struggle against the government. Student struggles started in various parts of Travancore. The militant rank and file of the Congress started organizing committees of action to effectively lead the struggle for responsible government. The leadership of the State Congress itself was forced not only to

start preparations for a new struggle but also to contact the underground Communist leadership to give a militant character to that struggle. This new round of struggles forced the government to announce the end of Dewan rule and the establishment of responsible government.

As in 1938, so also now, the Government of Cochin followed a different policy. It announced that it was expanding the scope of the constitutional reforms introduced in 1938 and throwing open all departments except for finance and home to admistration by elected ministers responsible to the legislature. While thus trying to win over the compromising leadership of the Praja Mandalam, which, of course, accepted the 'reforms', the government attacked all the genuinely democratic elements in the Praja Mandalm as well as the leftists including the Communist leadership who had become the spearhead of the people's movement. Other sections of the democratic movement like the students were also attacked. This attack was finally directed against the Praja Mandalam itself, its ministers being forced out of the ministry by the stooges of the palace. This, however, could not last long because in the conditions of the general democratic upsurge of the post-war years, the demand for democratic rule could not be resisted; responsible government had ultimately to be conceded in Cochin as well.

In these years of the post-war upsurge, the Communist Party began to come out of the comparative isolation in which it found itself in the 1942-45 period. The Party took the consistently democratic stand on all issues and fought most courageously, with the utmost determination, for the demands of the people. Even the most prejudiced anti-Communists began to see that, whenever there was an issue that agitated the people, the communists were there to champion the interest of the people: SIR, Punnapra-Vayalar, North Malabar, Anthikkad, etc., in Kerala, as well as Tebhaga in Bengal, Telengana in Andhra, etc., in other parts of India, together with the glorious RIN revolt in B ombay, helped in once again drawing the best anti-imperialist democrats towards the Communists. Particularly significant was the shift taking place inside the Socialist Party, the majority of the 1942 generation of Socialists getting more

and more dissatisfied with their leadership and being inclined towards a revolutionary reorientation of their policy.

In this period of post-war revolutionary upsurge, the shortcoming of the Communist Party noted earlier, its failure to have a correct approach to the strategy of revolution, became a real hindrance to the development of the revolutionary movement. Sunk as the Party was in an outlook which tended to underestimate the role of the working class and peasantry, it could not correctly gauge the character of the mass actions of 1946-47. For example, in the development of the struggle in Travancore, the Party failed to work out a plan of linking up the resistance of the working class of Alleppey with the struggle of the peasantry for land on an all-state scale. So did the Party in Malabar fail to support the peasant struggles of North Malabar with strike action of the working class of Malabar. The result was that, though the working class of Ambalapuzha and Chertala taluks, the peasants of North Malabar, the workers and middle class of Cochin, etc., fought heroically; though, in each of these struggles, the Communists stood at the head of the fighters, these separate struggles could not be coordinated and developed into a common struggle for People's Democracy.

The ideological root of the Communist Party's shortcoming in the post-war years was its failure to see that the gigantic struggles that had started breaking out towards the end of 1945 were struggles for the realization of People's Democracy, i. e., for the consistent carrying out of the democratic revolution under the leadership not of the bourgeoisie but of the proletariat, so that the subsequent socialist revolution could be prepared for. The Party failed to see in 1947-48 that a fundamental transformation in agrarian relations had already been put on the agenda; that the vehicles of carrying out these transformations were the revolutionary peasant committees in the villages linked on the one hand with the revolutionary committees of action in factories and, on the other, with similar committees of the petty bourgeoisie and other democratic elements. Further, it was not appreciated that in bringing about these fundamental transformations in agrarian relations, the working class and peasan-

try would have to beat down the opposition of the reactionary sections of the bourgeoisie; moreover this struggle against reactionary elements could be successful only if utmost reliance was placed on the resourcefulness and initiative of the masses of workers and peasants, on their ability to discover ever-newer and newer forms of resistance to the enemy. Failure to see these elements of a qualitatively new political situation made the Communists trail behind the bourgeoisie at a time when the people as a whole had already started looking up to the Communist Party as an alternative leadership challenging the bourgeoisie.

It should nevertheless be mentioned that, though with an inadequate realization of the character of the period and of the tasks for the period, the Communist Party was the only force that stood with the people in these struggles. It was the leadership given by the Party that made possible Punnapra-Vayalar, North Malabar, Anthikkad, etc., the glorious indications of a new phase in the struggle for independence and democracy—a phase in which the working class and not the bourgeoisie was looked upon as the leader of the people.

9

Aikya Kerala : Realization Of a Dream

The national question or the question of formation of states on a linguistic basis and of state autonomy in a federal set up, was, along with the agrarian question, the most powerful force behind the post-war revolutionary upsurge swaying millions of people throughout India. This same national question, however was diverted into reactionary and disruptive channels by imperialism. The religious twist given to the national question by pro-imperialist elements in the beginning gave birth to the cry of Pakistan and became the weapon with which the broadest possible unity of the Indian people against imperialism was disrupted, ending in one of the most terrible carnages in human history and the creation of two hostile states - the Indian Union and Pakistan.

A similar effort to make use of the national question against the democratic movement was made in 1946-47 by the Government of Travancore. Those were the years, as we have seen, in which a mighty mass movement with the two slogans, 'Down with the American Model' and 'End the Dewan Rule', was shaking the autocratic rule to its foundations. One of the weapons which the government used against this movement was the national sentiment of the Tamilian people of South Travancore. The holy anger of the common people of Tamil Nadu against their oppressors, the ruling family of Travancore and its feudal satellites, was successfully diverted into hatred for the nationality of these oppressors. 'Down with the Malayalees' was the slogan through which the Tamilian people of South Travancore were rallied against the democratic movement. On this basis was built what was known as the 'Independent Travancore'

movement, 'demanding' that Travancore should not join the Indian Union, obviously directed against the unity of the Indian democratic movement. Though formally an 'all-Travancore' movement, it was only among the Tamilians in South Travancore that it had some mass following.

While the Government of Travancore was thus utilizing the national aspirations of the Tamilian people of South Travancore, the Government of Cochin was in another manner using the national aspirations of the Malayalees. The first half of 1946 saw in Cochin a similar democratic upsurge as was witnessed in Travancore. The demand for responsible government was rallying behind it all sections of the people, as a result of which even the 1942 gulf between the Communists and the rest of the democratic camp was being bridged. Joint rallies, demonstrations, etc., were being organized to voice this united demand. On July 29, 1946, precisely when an all-Cochin demonstration and a general strike of the working class and hartal of the merchants throughout the state were scheduled to be organized, the Maharaja came out with an announcement that (1) he was in perfect sympathy with the people's demand for responsible government and was taking steps to introduce it; and that (2) it was his cherished desire to work towards merging Cochin in a United Kerala province. The Maharaja significantly added that, in introducing responsible government and in establishing a United Kerala, all the hereditary honours and privileges of the ruling families would be preserved.

The Maharaja's statement was hailed as an 'inspiring lead' by the bourgeois leadership of the national movement not only in Cochin but throughout Kerala. The KPCC, the Cochin Praja Mandalam and the Travancore State Congress declared in one voice that they were going to work towards the realization of the objective set before them by the 'magnanimous' Maharaja. They, in consultation with several other organizations, set up a United Kerala Committee and began preparations for a United Kerala Convention which was held in April 1947 under the chairmanship of the President of the KPCC. Naturally, it was inaugurated by the Maharaja of Cochin who became the patron of the United Kerala movement.

Having thus successfully won over the goodwill of the bourgeois leadership of the national movement, the Government of Cochin started an offensive against the democratic movement—first against its vanguard but gradually against the entire movement. This has already been referred to in the last chapter. It need only be mentioned here that, because of the clever manoeuvres of the authorities in Cochin on the issue of responsible government and United Kerala, a big section of the democrats remained loyal to the Maharaja. Even when the Praja Mandalam ministers were thrown out of office, it was sought to be explained away as having been caused by the machinations of the people surrounding the Maharaja; the Maharaja himself was portrayed as blameless. Thus the anti-feudal democratic edge of the movement was blunted.

Furthermore, the very interpretation given to the United Kerala movement under the patronage of the Maharaja was as disruptive of the unity of the Indian democratic movement as the 'Down with Malayalees' movement in South Travancore. What the bourgeois leadership of the United Kerala movement wanted was not the unification of the contiguous areas of Madras, Cochin and Travancore where the Malayalam-speaking people form the majority, but the carving out of a multilingual province on the west coast. In this 'United Kerala' should be included, they demanded, not only the Tamil areas of South Travancore but other non-Malayalee areas like the northern Tulu and Canarese majority parts of South Kanara, Coorg, and the Tamil and tribal areas of the Nilgiris. This naturally roused intense indignation among the Tamilians, Kannadigas and the people of Coorg.

This chauvinistic interpretation of United Kerala was based on a falsified 'history' of Kerala according to which the ancient empire of Kerala stretched from Kanyakumari in the south to Gokarnam in the north. The Maharaja of Cochin's announcement on United Kerala in fact spoke of that ancient empire of Kerala whose restoration in all its glory was set before the people as the grand objective to be attained. Furthermore, the United Kerala Convention held in April 1947 paid tribute, by the erection of a statue before the Convention pandal, to Para-

surama of ancient myth, the legendary creator of Kerala. We have seen in earlier chapters how specious are the 'theories' of history based on the legend of Parasurama and how these 'theories' have their origin in the feudal-militarist ruling classes of medieval Kerala. That it was on this false 'theory of history' that the bourgeois organizers of the United Kerala movement based themselves shows the utterly reactionary character of their leadership over the movement.

Despite this, however, the movement rallied the democratic elements of Kerala. Although resenting the domination of the feudal elements headed by the Maharaja of Cochin, democratic sections of the people enthusiastically participated in the United Kerala Convention. The United Kerala Committee set up to continue the work of the Convention became the rallying centre of a large number of democratic organizations and groups. Never before in the history of Kerala had the slogan of United Kerala attracted such wide mass support. It seemed that everybody was for United Kerala.

Behind this apparent unity on the issue of United Kerala, very serious rifts emerged which became increasingly serious as days passed. The ruling family of Travancore and its satellites were opposed to United Kerala since it would lead to an undermining of their authority, at least to some extent; they were also determined that the Tamilians of South Travancore should not be allowed to join their brethern in the Madras part of Tamilnad. The bourgeoisie of Travancore for its part was anxious to keep the Tamilnad part of Travancore inside United Kerala, they were willing to give up their demand for United Kerala, if realizing it implied the relinquishing of the Tamil areas. The bourgeoisie of Cochin and Malabar were anxious to see Kerala united were at the same time afraid that United Kerala would be dominated by the economically stronger and politically better organized bourgeoisie of Travancore. These conflicts among the ruling classes of Kerala, on the one hand and of the neighbouring nationalities on the other, were fully exploited by the government of India and its states ministry to bring the states of Cochin and Travancore fully under its cont-

rol and to smash the demand for United Kerala.

When the Government of India and the states ministry initiated their policy of integration and merger of Indian states, Travancore and Cochin were among the few states excluded from this process on the ground that they were 'viable' states, like Mysore, Kashmir and Hyderabad. But, as integration and merger of 'non-viable' states were on the verge of being successfully concluded, the question arose of bringing them also under the full control of the states ministry. This was an important question for the additional reason that the democratic movement had already raised the slogan of uniting these two states with Malabar to form United Kerala. The states ministry, therefore, conceived the plan of uniting these two states to form a new Travancore-Cochin state.

This was presented before the champions of United Kerala as 'the first step' in the direction of realizing their goal : it was under this false plea that a section of the democratic people in Cochin and Travancore was led to accept it. As a matter of fact, however, it was a step, not in the direction of, but away from, the realization of United Kerala. For, not only did it continue the multilingual character of the new state of Travancore-Cochin, it also continued the division of both the Tamilian and the Malayalee peoples into those living in the state of Madras and in the new state of Travancore-Cochin; it at the same time perpetuated the rule of the Maharaja of Travancore as the Rajpramukh of the new state and provided for the payment of nearly Rs. 40 lakhs per year as allowance to the two ruling families of Travancore and Cochin. The Covenant which was drawn up as the basis for the formation of the new state and which was made part of the new Constitution of India made Travancore-Cochin a Part B state in whose affairs the Government of India had extensive powers of interference and control.

With this ended one phase of the struggle for United Kerala-the phase in which there was some hope that, if the people remained united, they could make the Government of India itself implement the slogan of United Kerala. That was the time when the all-India leadership of the Congress had to

resort to various stratagems like the appointment of the Dhar Commission, the publication of its report, its further examination by the J.V.P. Committee, etc., to sidetrack the people from the question of the formation of linguistic states. The inauguration of the Constitutions of India in 1950, following as it did the unification of Travancore and Cochin into one state, put new obstacles in the way of United Kerala. The modification of the Covenant of the unification of Travancore and Cochin; the tansformation of the new Travancore-Cochin from the status of a Part B state to a Part A state; the ratification by the Indian Parliament as well as by the legislatures of Madras and Travancore-Cochin states; all these exteremely difficult processes had to be gone through if a United Kerala state was to be formed. The United Kerala movement under bourgeois leadership therefore died a natural death; the United Kerala Committee which functioned for a couple of years was liquidated.

II

Though the United Kerala movement under bourgeois leadership was thus disrupted, the democratic upsurge out of which that movement arose did not come to an end. On the contrary it grew stronger and stronger with the passage if time.

It was in the midst of the biggest wave of mass actions achieving their highest forms in Punnapra-Vayalar and North Malabar that the KPCC-sponsored United Kerala movement arose. The brutal terror unleashed to suppress the common people who participated in these actions was ineffective. Though for a short while it succeeded in establishing a deathly calm in Ambalapuzha-Chertala taluks and in North Malabar, it ultimately released a far bigger wave of mass actions. In less than a year after the sanguinary massacre of Vayalar, tens of thousands of voices shouted : 'Vayalar blood is our blood', 'Release the heroes of Punnapra-Vayalar', 'Try and punish the police officers who murdered at Vayalar'. Not only Communists, but Socialists, Congressmen, all democrats, took up the cause of Punnapra-Vayalar as their own. Karivellore and Kavumpayi in North Malabar (the two places where peasants were

shot dead in Chirakkal taluk) also became symbols of the new phase of the struggle for land and democracy. The prestige and popularity of the Communist Party, the leader and organizer of these revolutionary actions, grew as never before.

The first elections to the legislatures of Travancore and Cochin, which took place in February and September 1948, respectively, showed that the left and democratic forces were uniting against the Congress. The Communist Party and the newly-formed Kerala Socialist Party (a party composed of the majority of the Congress Socialists in Kerala recruited in the years after 1942) formed a united front in Travancore to fight the Congress. They also united in boycotting the elections in Cochin. There also was an agreement between these two parties and the Travancore Tamilnad Congress in South Travancore. Though the candidates of the Communist — KSP United Front in Travancore did not secure a single seat, their joint campaign served to educate the people on the task of fighting for genuine democracy. Furthermore, the fact that they secured over two lakhs out of a total of over 20 lakh votes polled, added to the further fact that out of the balance, over five lakhs were polled by the Travancore Tamilnad Congress, showed that there was as solid mass basis for the struggle against the Congress.

Similarly in Cochin, though the boycott of the elections was compratively ineffective, the campaign that the two parties together carried on against the Praja Mandalam and the People's Congress (an organization of the stooges of the palace) served to show that a new force was rising to fight reactionaries of all hues. It would have been far more effective, of course, if, as in Travancore, the two parties had jointly fought the election and consolidated the democratic forces. But the fact that they pursued the same policy in fighting reaction was a significant development since it indicated, as did the joint participation in the Travancore election, the emergence of a united revolutionary opposition.

Meanwhile, extra-parliamentary struggles were also breaking out on a big scale. Special mention should be made of two of these struggles.

The *Paliyam Satyagraha* to assert the right of untouchables to walk along certain roads that were prohibited to them was significant in two respects. First, it was directed against the biggest landlord in Cochin, and therefore, struck a sympathetic chord among the touchable peasants as well as among the untouchables; it was in fact a big mass action of the peasantry against feudal landlords, though it was not fought on a directly agrarian issue. Second, having been directed against the most decadent, the most barbarous form of caste separatism, it rallied the progressives of all castes; among the satyagrahis who braved the lathis of the police were boys and girls of the highest castes, including members of the ruling families of the state. It had the support of all the caste organizations, all the political parties (including local committees of the Congress) and several prominent individuals. It is significant that a Communist leader of the dock workers of Cochin, A.G. Velayudhan, died at the hands of the police while leading a squad of working-class volunteers to the scene of the satyagrah. Here was, therefore, that combination of the struggle for social equality, the struggle against landlordism, the mobilization of all democrats and progressives and the leadership in action of the working class, which is the essence of the struggle for a United Democratic Kerala.

The second struggle that should be specially mentioned is the *glorious struggle of the North Malabar peasantry*. This, as is well-known, was the most determined action which the rural poor of North Malabar resorted to against the landlord hoarders. It unleashed such an unprecedented mass force, the people who participated in it showing a high degree of militancy and resourcefulness that the government had to call the military to crush it. Karivellore, Korome, Pazhassi, Thillengeri, Onchiyam, Munaynkunnu became the symbols of a new phase in the history of our peasant movement, the phase in which the organized peasantry under Communist leadership relied on its own strength to defeat its class enemy.

These struggle were, however, conducted at a time when the Congress still had the halo of the biggest if not the only national organization in the country. Congress had got full power

at the Centre only a few weeks before; it was on the eve of cosming to power in Travancore and Cochin. A sizeable section of democrats therefore felt that the Congress should be given time and that the Communists were unnecessarily creating trouble for the Congress and its government. This view was shared by sections of the peasantry and of the working class itself. The genuine desire of sections of the democratic people to give time to the Congress government was fully utilized against the fighting vanguard of the people, the Communist Party.

This attitude, however, was extremely short lived. The people soon began to see that Congressmen in power did not mean people's representatives in power, but corrupt and greedy individuals trying to loot the people through misuse of the state machinery Corruption in the granting of permits and bus routes, in the assignment of lands, widespread nepotism, creation of new jobs to give employment to Congress stooges—were all added to the burden of increase in the price of rice, successive breakdowns of the rationing system, squeezing of the poor peasant in the name of procurement, unrestricted blackmarket and endless repression, People began to see that the limitless greed and selfishness of Congressmen were leading them to mutual squabbles on the issue of dividing the loot. Groups of Congress sympathizers were disgusted when they saw minister after minister, MLA after MLA, intriguing against one another. Newspaper columns, trains and buses, shops and offices, every place where people had an opportunity to get together and discuss, became places for expressing extreme indignation at what was happening, hatred and contempt for the 'national organization' and its leaders.

This was naturally sought to be utilized by rectionaries of all hues. The Catholic hierarchy in Travancore and Cochin, Hindu reaction, different factions in the Congress, all took advantage of the anti-Congress sentiment in order pull down their adversaries from seats of power and to secure their own narrow, sectional interests. Organizations like the Hindu Mandlam and the Cochin Party, emerged. Large sections of the people, however, rejected these reactionary parties and their false slogans, and rallied round the Communist Party and other democratic

parties and organizations. It is remarkable that, in the first municipal elections that took place in Cochin after the Congress Ministry took office (the elections of December, 1948), the Communists secured a sizable percentage of seats. It is also remarkable that the first Communist elected to the Cochin state legislature early in 1949, Gokalakrishna Menon, was underground at that time. And by 1950, when a series of by-elections took place in the Travancore-Cochin state, the Congress had become so discredited that it lost most of the seats.

III

One indication of the process of disillusionment among the people was the growth of a new generation of socialists (in place of the 1942-45 generation the majority of whom had left the Socialist Party to from the KSP and started joint work with the Communists) as well as the origin and development of what later became the KMP Party. When the genuinely democratic rank and file of the Congress began to get disgusted with their own organization, although they had not yet cast off their ideological and political prejudices against the Communist Party, they started seeking out new forms of organization for their activity. The development of these parties was an indication that, instead of the Congress succeeding in isolating the vanguard from the masses of the democratic movement, the Congress was itself geting isolated from the masses.

The factor that proved decisive in the situation however was the leading role played by the Communist Party. It was the Communist Party which, after an initial phase of considering the National Congress a part of the anti-imperialist movement even after the August 15 transfer of power, undertook extensive popularization of the slogan : 'Replace the Congress Government by a People's Democratic Government.' It was again the Communist Party which stood at the head of the fighting people in a series of major and minor struggles, such the Paliyam Satyagraha, the North Malabar struggle, the September (1948) strike of Travancore students, several struggles of the industrial and agricultural labourers, etc. The Party penetrated into several new areas and built up the democratic movement in

spite of the tremendous difficulties it had to face.

All these activities provoked unprecedented repression involving the imprisonment of over 3,000 Party members and sympathizers, the arrest and beating up of thousands of people and other unspeakable atrocities, committed by the police. Enemies of the Party thought, as they had in 1940 and 1946, that the Party was completely smashed; friends of the Party and even sections of the Party membership thought that the Party had gone too far in leading struggles. It was, however, proved by the subsequent demonstration of popular support for the Party, the tremendous mass response when the leaders of the Party came out of jail in 1951, that, as on earlier occasions, repression had, far from weakening, strengthened the Party.

It does not, of course, follow from this that the Party committed no mistakes in leading these struggles. Mistakes were undoubtedly committed both of a strategical and tactical nature : the Party swung from the original mistake of overestimating the role of the brougeoisie in colonial revolutions to the new mistake of totally denying that role; in the process of correcting the earlier mistake of underestimating the leading role of the working class, the Party committed the equally serious mistake of denying the role of the peasantry, petty bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie, denying the crucal importance of the anti-imperialist nationalist factor, virtually denying the fact that British imperialism still had its grip over India. Mistakes were also Commited in the direction of underestimating the role of parliamentary work in further advancing the democratic movement, equating the gradual process of mass disillusionment with the Congress which was taking place with the already completed process of the isolation of the Congress from the people, advancing forms of struggle for which the masses were not yet ready, etc.; Despite these mistakes, however, the Party was going along generally correct lines. Its main political line of fighting the Congress government, its central political slogan of 'replacing the Congress government by a People's Democratic Government' was quite in tune with the aspirations of the people. It was not the party but its main political opponent—the Congress government—that was getting isolated from the people.

This reality became clear beyond dispute when the results of the first general elections in the first quarter of 1952 were announced. The Congress claim of being the unchallenged leader of the people was proved hollow. The Communist Party and various socialist parties on the left, as well as communal and other opposition parties on the right, did put up an effective fight against the Congress. Among these opposition parties, however, it was the Communist Party and not the Socialist Party (then under the joint leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan, Ashok Mehta, Lohia and so on) that emerged as the leading party of opposition. The leader of Communist Party in Parliament became the leader of the entire opposition; the same position prevailed in four state legislatures—West Bengal, Hyderabad, Madras and Travancore-Cochin; in the last two there was even a possibility of the Communist and their allies forming a coalition (non-Congress) government.

The electorate of Kerala played a particularly significant role in this development. Both in Travancore-Cochin and in Malabar, the Congress was reduced to a minority both in terms of the votes polled as well as in the seats secured: it secured 44 out of 108 seats and 11,95,943 out of 33,41,767 votes in Travancore-Cochin; in Malabar, the figures were four out of 30 seats with 3,02,353 out of 11,37,335 votes. Furthermore, it was the united front of leftists (Communist Party, Revolutionary Socialist Party, and Kerala Socialist Party) in Travancore-Cochin and the alliance of the Communist Party, Kisan Mazddor Praja Party and Independents in Malabar that secured the majority of opposition votes and seats.

IV

Among the important factors which led to the defeat of the Congress in the 1952 elections was the national aspiration of the non-Hindi-speaking peoples to have their own states on the basis of the linguistic-cultural principle.

The Congress suffered the biggest reverses in the non-Hindi-speaking regions—the Punjab, Bengal, Andhra, Tamilnad and

Kerala. Each of them had its own variant of the national (linguistic-cultural) problems and movement. The Punjabi national problem, for instance, was mixed up with the problem of Sikh *vs* Hindu communalism; the nationalism of Andhra and Kerala was directed against the North on the one hand and Tamilnad on the other. Tamil nationalism, in its turn, was to a limited extent directed against Kerala and Andhra but was mainly anti-North (added to which was anti-brahminism).

The Communist Party was the one party which tried to intervene in the developing national situation, to give the emerging national movement a progressive democratic content. The Party's understanding had no doubt been incorrect earlier in the sense of mixing up the national and religious questions (support to the demand for Pakistan). This, however, did not prevent it from championing the demand of the various nationalities in the Indian sub-continent for the formation of their own states and for autonomy of the nationally reorganized states. Furthermore, the Communist Party demarcated itself from the national-chauvinists within each nationality and fought for the solution of borders and other disputes with neighboring nationalities on the basis of justice and democracy.

This added to the militant mass struggles led by the Party made it a big political force in Kerala and Andhra. The relative weakness of the Party in the Punjab, Tamilnad, Orissa and elsewhere enabled other political parties and groups (like the Akalis in the Punjab, the Dravida Kazhakam in Tamilnad and Ganatantra Parishad in Orissa) to utilize the growing political discontent as well as the national factor both against the Congress as well as against the left opposition. Even in the Hindi regions where the Communist Party was relatively weak, parties of right opposition and communalism utilized to their own advantage not only the growing discontent of the masses against the Congress regime but the national sentiment of Hindi replacing English.

It was natural under these circumstances that the post-election period should witness a new political upsurge demanding the formation of linguistic states, or rather for the implementation

of the policy adopted by the Congress as long ago as in 1921. Andhra, Maharashtra, Karnataka reinforced the movement for the formation of their respective states. The democratic movements in 'Part B' (former princely) states put up their own demand for full equality with 'Part A' states. They in their turn were joined by their brethern of 'Part C' states. The complete reorganization of existing (Part A, B and C) states with necessary border adjustments to form linguistic states thus came on the agenda.

The Congress leadership was totally opposed to this. Forgetting all their earlier commitments, they began to praise the virtues of multilingual states, since they were allegedly 'broad and cosmopolitan' as opposed to linguistic states which were 'narrow and parochical'. We have already seen how they manoeuvred in the immediate post-Independence years (through the Dhar Commission and the J. V. P. Report). They framed the 'Republican' Constitution in which the biggest princes were transformed into Raj Pramukhs; the 'Democratic' constitution according to which the administration in all the non-Hindi states was to be carried on in one of two languages (English or Hindi) neither of which was understood by the people. This callousness to the needs and desires of the people—particularly the people of non-Hindi states—was continued in the post-election years.

The people, however were not prepared to bow to the will of the ruling Congress party. The demand for states reorganization became insistent. It assumed the biggest proportion in the shortest time in Andhra whose national movement was three to four decades old. All sections of the people in Andhra joined the movement. It was against this background that an old respected Gandhite, Potti Srinamulu, went on hunger-strike to enforce the demand for the formation of Andhra state. when the government refused to concede the demand and consequently Potti Srinamulu died, there was a veritable revolt in Andhra.

The situation got so out of control that the government was forced to (i) form an Andhra state minus Hyderabad as the

first step, and to (ii) set up a States Reorganization Commision entrusted with the task of examining the whole question.

These developments on the all-India plane enormously strengthened the movement for the formation of an Aikya (United) Kerala state. Many of those who had considered the demand for such a state to be unrealizable saw that they had been wrong. A new, more broad-based and better-organized Aikya Kerala movement took birth. A well-argued case was presented before the States Reorganization Commission.

It was not as if there were no voices of dissent. They did exist and had the support of powerful vested interests. There were, for instance, feudal circles in and around the ruling family of Travancore, who knew that the formation of Kerala state would lead to the inclusion of South Travancore in the Madras state; they could not reconcile themselves to a separation of that region (in which they were directly interested) from the new state; they, therefore, preferred the continuance of the bilingual state. Again, there were sections of professionals and government employees who were apprehensive of lesser employment opportunities since the new state would be smaller in size. Political considerations were also not wanting : was there not a danger of the new state being under Communist influence since the Party was strong both in Malabar and in Travancore-Cochin ?

These objections, however, were overcome not only by the democratic aspirations of the mass of the working people, but also by the class interests of the growing bourgeoisie. The politicians, professionals and the capitalist entrepreneurs of the Malabar region had the oppressive feeling that their rivals in Tamilnad were thwarting all attempts at the development of Malabar. Their counterparts in the Travancore-Cochin region saw in the new province a wider field for their activities, more favourable opportunities for the advancement of their interests: both joined the movement for Aikya Kerala.

Moved as they were by these considerations, they stood for as big a state as they could get: 'rejecting the false principle of

linguistic state,' they demended the Tamil-speaking taluks of south Travancore, the Kannada (or Tulu) speaking taluks of South Kanara and the mixed-linguistic Gudalur taluk in the Nilgiri district—all on the 'historical' claim that 'ancient Kerala extended from Gokarnam to Kanya Kumari'! But in the event of this not being realized, they were willing to settle for a smaller Kerala state rather than have Malabar continue to be part of Madras.

Actually, however, there was no possibility of their claim being accepted. The States Reorganization Commission rejected all their claims except for a part of Kasargod taluk—a part with Kannada (Tulu) majority—on the ground that the taluk as a whole is not Kannada majority and that a taluk should not be cut up. Barring this and barring the plantation belt of Devicolam and Peerumade (with a majority of Tamil labourers who however had their homes in the Madras state), the new state recommended by the Commission was in fact a linguistic state of the Malayalees.

The implementation of this recommendation, the formation of the new Kerala state on November 1, 1956 was thus the realization of the long cherished desire of progressive Malayalees.

10

The Fiasco of Anti-Communism

The Congress was reduced to a minority in three state legislatures (including that of Travancore-Cochin) which were formed after the first (1952) general election.

Each of these had the possibility of a non-Congress government coming into power. The tactics adopted by the central leadership, however, varied.

The bulk of the opposition in one of these — PEPSU — was of a rightist character. The Akalis constituted its backbone; the Communist Party, not to speak of other left opposition parties, was extremely weak. On the other hand, in the other two states—in Madras and in Travancore-Cochin—the Communist Party, together with some other left opposition groups and individuals, constituted the major opposition.

Taking this difference into account, the Congress leadership adopted two different courses: it allowed the Akalis and their allies in PEPSU to form their non-Congress government. In Madras and Travancore-Cochin, on the other hand, the leader of the minority Congress Party was asked to form his Government.

In all the three states, however, the ultimate game was identical — to break the unity of, and win over, a section of the opposition to the side of the Congress and then to consolidate its position. This common objective could be attained, the Congress leaders thought, by appeasing the right opposition in PEPSU, while an uncompromising stand had to be adopted to the left (mainly Communist) opposition in

Madras and Travancore-Cochin.

The position inside the state legislature was the same in PEPSU and Madras. The combined strength of opposition legislators was more than that of the Congress in both the states. They had, after the election, come together in a united front, elected a leader and informed the head of state (Raj Pramukh in PEPSU and the Governor in Madras) that they were ready to form a government. While the Raj Parmukh of PEPSU took the leader of the United Front at his word and allowed him to form a government, the Governor of Madras rejected the claim of the leader of the United Front. His argument was that the United Front was not a party but a post-election combination — precisely what the PEPSU united front also was.

Such an obvious political discrimination may appear repulsive to decent and democratic-minded people. But the Congress rulers had no use for decency or democracy. What they wanted above all was to prevent the formation of left governments anywhere. This could be done only by creating divisions and rifts within the opposition — as between the right and left opposition, and between the Communists and the rest within the left opposition. As the new Chief Minister of Madras, Rajagopalachari, said, "the Communist Party is enemy number one and will be fought from A to Z."

This tactical line was successful for the short time being. A section of the Akalis in PEPSU was gradually won over for the Congress. When this process had been initiated to an extent when it became clear that the Congress, in alliance with this section of the Akalis, could win a new election, the Central Government dismissed the state government (on the ground that the state government was helping the Communists!). The election which followed in 1953 resulted in complete victory for the Congress.

In Madras and Travancore-Cochin, the formation of the (minority) Congress government enabled the new Chief Minister to win over some non-Communist opposition groups

and individuals who offered their support to the Congress Government. The danger of non-Congress governments (including the Communist Party) was thus averted.

This, however, was temporary. The basic causes of the crisis remained. The non-Congress opposition was very powerful both in Travancore-Cochin and in Madras. Furthermore, the new allies of the Congress were not dependable enough to facilitate ministerial stability. Mid-term elections had therefore to be ordered in Travancore-Cochin in 1954 and in the newly-formed state of Andhra (that part of Madras where the left opposition was the strongest) in 1955.

Each of the three states where the Congress had been reduced to a minority in the 1952 general elections had thus to go through a mid-term electoion. This helped the Congress in PEPSU and in Andhra but not in Travancore-Cochin. With a section of the Akalis allied to the Congress, it was an easy walk-over for the Congress in PEPSU. Andhra was a tougher nut to crack, but the anti-Communist hysteria and the united front of anti-Communist forces helped the Congress to retrieve its 1952 loss. In Travancore-Cochin, on the other hand, even the mid-term election (1954) brought the Congress back to its 1952 (minority) position. What was worse from the Congress point of view was that the combined strength of the Communist and other left opposition parties was sufficient to form a government.

This was a threat which had to be met somehow. The Congress leaders evolved a new plan—allow the formation of a non-Congress government but not by the united front including the Communist Party. The PSP whose leaders had shouted from hundreds of platforms during the election campaign, "we (the Communist Party, RSP, KSP and PSP) fight together, shall govern together", was asked to form "its own (one-party)" government The only condition was that it should not depend on or cooperate with the Communists and other left parties. The Congress itself would be 'in opposition'; its leader in the legislature would be the leader of the

opposition; it would however vote with the PSP government — this was the arrangement according to which a puppet PSP government totally subservient to the Congress 'opposition' came into existence and governed the state for about 11 months.

Gradually, however, frictions developed between the PSP government and the Congress 'opposition'. Apart from the personal and factional quarrels between PSP and Congress leaders, there were political differences which could not be suppressed for all time. The relentless pressure put by the real (Communist-RSP-KSP) opposition forced the PSP government to introduce certain land reform bills in the legislature. This became the starting point of a statewide hysterical campaign, unleashed by the Congress, against the PSP government.

To this was added the discontent roused in the Tamil-speaking South Travancore area by the hostility shown by the PSP government to the demands of the Tamilian people. Clever use was made of this by the Congress to pull down the PSP government and to form a Congress government with the support of the South Travancore Tamilnadu Congress.

The new government was also short-lived. Not only were the conflicts between the Congress and the (South Travancore) Tamilnadu Congress continuing, but conflicts were developing inside the Congress leadership itself. A group of "dissident Congressmen" emerged and challenged the leadership and authority of the Chief Minister. When this inevitably led in February 1956 to the adoption of a no-confidence motion in the legislature, followed by the dissolution of the legislature and the establishment of president's rule, the outgoing Chief Minister exclaimed: "It is not the opposition that defeated my government, but my own party people".

The dissolution of the legislature should have been followed by another mid-term election. But since the second general election was to take place in a year, it was postponed. Meanwhile, the state of Travancore-Cochin minus South Travancore was transformed into Kerala by the addition of Malabar and part of South Kanara.

II

The developments described in the previous section indicate that the political crisis gripping the ruling Congress party had become much deeper in Travancore-Cochin than anywhere else in India. Not only could its alliances (with the South Travancore Tamilnad Congress and the PSP) fail to stabilise the Congress government here (as it could in PEPSU — with a section of the Akalis; in Madras — with the Tamilnad Toilers Party and other groups; and in Andhra — with those parties and groups with which the Congress formed an anti-Communist United Front in 1955), but the Travancore-Cochin Congress itself had become so crisis-ridden that it could not provide a stable government. Nowhere had the prestige of the Congress as the ruling party sunk so low as in Travancore-Cochin which now became the new state of Kerala.

Another, still more serious, aspect of the crisis was that the tactics pursued by the Socialist Party in 1952 and by the PSP in 1953-54 discredited the one politcal force which could have prevented the growth of the political influence and strength of the Communist Party. The Congress as well as the Socialist leaders had thought that the anti-Communism of the Socialist Party would help the formation of a non-Communist opposition which would absorb the growing mass discontent against the Congress. It was with this objective that the Socialists made a bid for the position of the major opposition (with a majority in a few states) in the 1952 election. It was again with this perspective that the well-known Nehru-Jayaprakash talks took place.

But the miserable all-India record of the Socialists in the 1952 election, coupled with the disgraceful performance of that party in Travancore-Cochin in 1954-55, brought the leaders of that party to the lowest depths of political prestige. No more would the people of India—the people of Kerala in particular—look upon this party as a serious opposition to the Congress. All those who genuinely wanted to defeat the Congress, to replace it in the seats of power, would flock to the Communist Party and its allies, since they alone had consistently played

the role of genuine opposition.

Coming as it did against this background, the formation of the new state of Kerala and the election that followed it raised the possibility of the Congress being replaced by the Communist Party as the ruling party.

This was, in fact, one of the considerations why a section of the ruling classes opposed the formation of the new state. Their point of view was turned down because the continuance of Travancore-Cochin would not solve the problem. After all, the Congress position in Travancore-Cochin as it stood was as bad as it would be in the new state; in one sense it might have been worse. For apart from the Communist Party which was as strong in Travancore-Cochin as in the new state, there was the South Travancore Tamilnadu Congress which would cease to exist in Kerala.

Furthermore, the separation of Malabar would strengthen the Congress in Madras. The formation of Kerala state would therefore be a lesser evil from the Congress point of view.

Another consideration which the Congress leaders had at the time was that a persistent anti-Communist campaign would help them to isolate the Communist Party as it had in Andhra. The chances were, if possibly even more favourable than in Andhra. For, the revelations made at and after the 20th Congress of the CPSU, followed by the Polish and Hungarian events, provided plenty of ammunition to the anti-Communist campaign. Added to this were the laudatory terms in which the Soviet, Chinese and other world Socialist leaders spoke of India's achievements. The Congress leaders hoped to cash in on all this to claim that it was they and not the Communists, who would take the country forward along the path of democracy, peace and even socialism.

One more favourable factor for the Congress was that every one of the leftist allies of the Communist Party had given up the earlier policy. The PSP (which was with the Communists in Travancore-Cochin in 1954 joined the anti-Communist

chorus. Even after the end of the brief honeymoon with the Congress in 1954-55, it did not realise its mistake: the utmost that it did before the 1957 election was not to join the Congress, preferring the Muslim League for its ally. As for the Praja Party of the Malabar area (which had an electoral understanding with the Communists in 1952), its leaders had joined the Congress. Even the RSP and KSP broke with the Communists and fought the election on their own.

The congressmen hoped that this virtual isolation of the Communists, would make it impossible for the Communist Party to reach any where near a majority of seats in the legislature. This was also the fear of the friends of the Communists most of whom had taken it as an incontrovertible truth that only a united front of left parties would help to defeat the Congress. (It may be relevant in this connection to recall a statement made by the late Ajoy Ghosh, then General Secretary of the Communist Party, that a majority for the Party was unlikely. It fell to the writer of these lines, who was in the midst of his election campaign, to publicly contradict this and say that victory for the Party was quite possible.)

The result of the election, therefore, was surprising to the Congress leaders. The Communists and their allies (Independents) emerged successful in 65 out of 126 seats—just the number that was required to form a Government. No amount of anti-Communist campaigning by the Congress or its allies could sway the voters of Kerala from their determination to defeat the Congress.

The verdict would have been far more decisive if the PSP, RSP and KSP had cooperated with the Communist Party. But even without their cooperation, the Communists, together with the Independents allied to them, secured an absolute majority of seats and 40 per cent of the votes polled, compared to between 30 and 35 per cent of the votes secured by the Congress in 1952 and 1954.

This was indeed a new stage in the development of Kerala politics—a stage in which the Communist Party could success-

fully challenge the Congress.

The absolute majority of seats won by the Communitst Party and its Independent allies put the Central Government and the all-India leadership of the Congress on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, there was no constitutional argument with which the Communists could be prevented from forming a government : 65 members of the state legislature (out of 126) met, formed a legislature party, elected a leader and told the Governor that they were prepared to form a government. On the other hand, the formation of such a government would have serious repercussions throughout the country; the image of the Congress as the unchallenged and unchallengeable ruling party of India would be erased and the contagion might spread all over the body politic of the country.

The dilemma was broken in the end by a division of labour as between the Central Government and the central leadership of the Congress. The former took the constitutionally 'correct' stand of permitting the formation of the Government and 'offering its cooperation' to this non-Congress Government. The President of the Indian Union went to the extent of characterizing the formation of this government as an instance of applying the principle of 'peaceful coexistence' to internal political questions. The central leadership of the Congress, on the other hand, resorted to the tactics of forging the unity of all anti-Communist forces for opposition, obstruction and subversion.

Even the attitude of the Central Government (acting through its representative, the Governor) was not above-board. The Governor, for instance, did not accept the letter given to him that a Communist Legislature Party had come into existence. He called the Independents who had joined the Communist Legislature Party individually to 'satisfy himself' that they were genuinely with the Communists. Only after finding that they stood firmly behind the Communist Party, that they would not be available to the Congress for disruption, did the Governor call on the leader of the Communist Party to form the Government.

Even at this stage, the Governor used his discretionary power to nominate an Anglo-Indian to the legislature to strengthen the Congress; thus rejecting the claim of the Communist Party that the nomination should be made on its recommendation (since it was the new ruling party). The Governor nominated a person who was committed to vote with the Congress.

While it was clear that the Central Government would do everything to create difficulties for the new government provided it had some semblance of constitutional validity, it did not go out of its way to obstruct the working of the Government. As a matter of fact, when a dispute arose between the Governor and the new Government on the granting of mercy to a prisoner condemned to death, the issue was finally settled to the satisfaction of the government. There was. from this point on, an appearance of constitutional propriety on the part of the Governor as well as of the Central Government.

The central leadership of the Congress, however. did not hide its displeasure at what had happened in Kerala. Hardly had the new government been sworn in when the General Secretary of the Congress, Shriman Narayan, 'discovered' a 'sense of insecurity' among the people of Kerala. The formation of the new Government, it was suggested, heralded a situation of serious danger to the person and property of peace-loving and law-abiding people. This line laid down by their all-India leader was further elaborated by the Congress leaders of Kerala who unleashed a vicious campaign of lies and slander.

This, however, did not make an impact on the people. On the contrary, this anti-Communist, anti-Government campaign boomeranged on the Congress. The people had seen with their own eyes how the Congress had for so long misruled the state; how, it was unable even to maintain its own internal unity. The record of ministerial crises and changes, manipulation and intrigues by its leaders, individually and in groups, had thoroughly discredited it as the ruling party. But the moment the people punished them by not only reducing them into a minority but by giving an absolute majority to another party, the Congress

leaders tried to pull/down the new government. This 'dog in the manager' attitude—unable to rule, but unwilling to let somebody else rule the state—was resented by impartial people.

This was not all. The way in which the new government began functioning created a tremendous favourable impression. There was, to begin with, the policy statement of the new ministry which put forward the modest objective of sincerely implementing those progressive policies and measures which the Congress Party and the Central Government had laid down but which the previous Congress governments in the state refused to implement. This cut the ground from those who were trying to scare unwary people with stories of 'Russia and China repeating themselves in Kerala'. Then there was the announcement that the ministers would take very low salaries of Rs. 500 each per month which was in strict accordance with the Karachi resolution of the Congress. (It may be mentioned that only the Independents who were ministers took Rs. 500, the Communists drawing only Rs. 350). Above all, the first legislative measure undertaken by the new government was the complete and fool-proof ban on all ejectments of tenants pending the drawing up of a comprehensive land reform legislation. These and other indications of the functioning of the new ministry showed that here was a group of dedicated servants of the people, rather than self-seekers who use politics for their own personal and factional ends.

All this was making a big impact on the people not only in Kerala but throughout the country. That, however, was all the more reason for the Congress, the PSP, the Muslim League and even the smaller parties which were not represented in the legislature, to think it necessary to join forces in a firm anti-Communist united front. This they did in the first weeks after the ministers were sworn in : the very first sitting of state legislature which took place before the end of one month after the formation of the ministry witnessed the unity of the opposition under the leadership and the Congress. This anti-government unity inside the legislature was supplemented by a unity outside, not only among these parties as parties but in the columns of the newspapers. The majority of the newspapers in the

language, numbering over 30, switched to a policy of distortions and lies intended to defame and discredit the ministry as a whole, as well as the ministers individually. 'Take advantage of every available opportunity, use every specific issue to slander them; if there is no opportunity, no issue available, create them'. This became the motto of anti-Communist newspapers and agitators. Let us enumerate a few (only the most important) examples :

1. The formation of the new ministry coincided with a very bad food situation. Those who know anything about the economy of Kerala know that no government in the state—Congress, PSP or Communist—can do anything about the food unless the Centre helps by arranging supplies in time and at cheaper rates. Yet the combined opposition launched a campaign directed against the state government. Black-flag demonstrations directed against the state ministers with slogans demanding food were organized throughout the state.

2. With a view to meeting the difficult food situation, the government sent its officers to Andhra (the main source of rice supply) and purchased rice. The need being urgent, the normal formalities of calling for tenders and coming to agreement with the lowest bidder were not gone through. A contract was signed with a party who agreed to supply quickly at current market price and the supplies did come in time. But a big furore was raised over the fact that tenders were not called. Allegations were made that the price paid by the government was more than what the dealer got, the difference being pocketed by the Communist Party. (It is significant that neither the ministers concerned nor anybody else was accused of pocketing the difference for himself. The ministers had such a reputation for incorruptibility that no charge of corruption against them would have been believed by the people. It was, however felt that the charge of 'collective corruption by and for the Party' would go down, since the ministers are known to be dedicated persons with high standards of personal integrity, living and working for the Party —'They will do anything to strengthen the Party'!) This became one of the points of persistent cam-

paign against the government and the Party since then.

3. The new government laid down a new police policy. It was a departure from the old hated and discredited policy in two respects. First, it impressed on the officers and men of the service that they formed the arm of a democratic state and therefore (like the entire state machinery) servants of the people. Their attitude and behaviour towards the people should have this basic outlook—the exact opposite of a bossist outlook towards the people. Second, it laid down that in all cases of worker-capitalist or peasant-landlord disputes, police intervention should only be at such a stage of the dispute when there was an actual threat to peace. These directives were naturally welcomed by the common people who heaved a sigh of relief that the police would not be the oppressive machine that it used to be. For the same reason, however, the landlords, capitalist and other vested interests were up in arms. 'Our persons and properties are in danger', was their slogan. This was loyally and dutifully taken up by the combined opposition whose leaders echoed the slogan of insecurity. "The Communists are out to demoralized and disrupt the police in order to create disorder in the country" they shouted.

4. The police policy, however, was only one aspect of the general outlook of the official machinery towards the people, their organizations and leaders. Government officers were asked by the new government to be responsive to the representations of people's leaders. The ministers themselves showed the way by constituting non-official committees to advise and help the government at various levels and for various departments, with representatives of all political parties and organizations. This naturally gave the Communist Party, along with other political parties, a position which had so far been denied to it. This was galling to the local gentry who were shocked to find government officials giving a respectful hearing to a backward-caste poor peasant, or worse still an artisan or agricultural labourer who was the local leader of the Communist Party. How could they tolerate a state of affairs in which the worker-peasant cadres of the Communist Party could have the same rights as were enjoyed by the 'respectable' upper class (or educated middle

class) leaders a 'respectable' parties ? This is nothing but 'Communist totalitarianism' ! Administrative services were being subordinated to the Communist Party !!

5. A particular instance of the change in the relationship between the Communist Party and the administration was the notorious "police verification" of the antecedents of recruits for govenment service. When the new ministers assumed charge and began to familiarize themselves with various problems, they came across a directive of the Central Government (the existence of which they had earlier suspected) that nobody should be recruited to government service (even if he or she had the requisite qualifications) if his or her past record showed association with the Communist Party or any organization connected with the Party. This was an obvious discrimination against the Communist Party, since association with the Congress or other parties was no bar to appointments. It was, therefore, resolved that this directive would no more be observed. A hue and cry was then raised that an effort was being made to fill government services with Communists. Removal of discrimination against Communists was thus paraded before the people as discrimination in favour of Communists !

It was against the background of such a vicious anti-Communist political campaign that the joint struggle to remove the Communists from office was organized. This struggle did in the beginning take the form of parliamentary manoeuvres—the efforts to "buy over" one or two Communist MLAs. This was the game played earlier by the Congress leaders in Kerala both against factional rivals in their own party as well as against any other party which might form a ministry. Beginning with the first Congress Ministry in Travancore, every one of the Congress Chief Ministers was forced to reshuffle his ministry and in the end to resign. It was in the same way that the PSP ministry of 1954-55 had been discredited, made ineffective and in the end toppled.

It was hoped that the same tactics would prove effective against the Communist ministry. If it did, if at least two Communist MLAs crossed the floor, the ministry would fall. If

only one crossed the floor, the fate of ministry would hang in the balance. The Communist had an original strength of 65, aad a voting strength of 64 (one of the 65 had become Speaker). If two crossed the floor they would be reduced to 62; the combined opposition, on the other hand, would be raised from 61 to 63. The bosses behind the Congress, therefore, tried their utmost to purchase one or two MLAs. The efforts however failed; the victims of their pressure exposed the whole game.

Another, attempt of a constitutional character was the concerted all-India drive to defeat the Communist candidate in a by-election caused by the unseating of the very same candidate who had won the seat in the general election. The Congress leadership, not only of Kerala but of the entire country, did everything possible to bring about the defeat of the Communist candidate. Other opposition parties, too, joined them and helped them. They, however, failed. The Communist candidate came out successful.

IV

All this made it obvious that the Communist government could not be removed through ordinary constitutional methods, that it would remain in power for its full term of five years. This was unheard of in Travancore and Travancore-Cochin, where there were six ministries in eight years. Furthermore this stable ministry would lay the basis for a stronger, even stable ministry after the third general election because the policies and practices of the Communist ministry were making the Government and the Party more and more popular.

If only the Agrarian Relations Bill (which was being considered by the legislature) became the law of the land, the mass of rural poor would rally themselves behind the Communist Party. While scrupulously adhering to the principles laid down by the Land Reforms Panel of the (all-India) Planning Commission, the bill provided for such safeguards for the tenants (fixity of tenure, lower rents, right of purchasing ownership) and for the landless labourers (fixity of tenure, etc., on the homesteads occupied by them, possibility of getting land through the distri-

bution of surplus land) as have never been provided for by any Congress Government either in Kerala or anywhere else in India. The implementation of this legislation by a Communist government would release such forces throughout India as to make it impossible to resist the demand for radical land reforms.

The central Congress leadership therefore "agreed" with the state leadership that the time had come to break the "fetters of constitutionalism", to resort to extra-constitutional means to remove the Communist Government. A whole campaign of direct action was evolved by the President of the KPCC and his colleagues on the one hand and the representatives of the Congress High Command on the other. This campaign included all those items which are denounced as "anti-social" by the Congress leaders themselves—obstructive picketing in front of government offices, attacks on government property, call to people not to subscribe to government loans, etc., and so forth. It included also such forms of struggles as are consisdered reprehensible by all decent people—physical attacks on women teachers, and foul abuse against passengers travelling in state transport buses. All this had the blessing of no less a person than the Congress President, Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

Not only was such a plan of direct action evolved, but its objective was laid down in unequivocal language—"to paralyse the administration of the state". Here, therefore, was a party which ruled the entire country but whose state unit (with the undisguised support of the central leadership) was trying to "paralyse the administration" in a part of the country ! Here was a call to the people to refuse to contribute to loans being collected under the directives of a (central) Government of the very same party which was calling for the boycott of the loans! These contradictions, however, did not worry the Congress leaders for whom, whatever they say in public, the guideline for practice is "everything is fair in war—particularly in a war of survival fought against such an enemy as Communism!"

The public stand taken by Prime Minister Nehru in the beginning was different from that of his colleagues in the organization—President Indira Gandhi, former President Dhebar, etc.

He did not give his blessing to the 'liberation struggle' ; he even criticized some aspects of the 'struggle' like the caste and communal approach involved in the opposition campaign. Even at this stage, however, he did not denounce the shamelessly unconstitutional 'struggle', did not put his foot down on the attempt to 'paralyse the administration' in a part of the country of which he was the Prime Minister. Gradually, as the tempo of the struggle began to heighten, he began to glorify this attempt at 'paralysing the administration' as a big 'mass upsurge.' Changing himself from the Prime Minister of the country to that of an elder statesman who was anxious to 'build a bridge' between the two banks of Kerala politics he 'advised' the Communist government to resign and arrange fresh elections.

The Communist Party or its government could not accept his 'advice'. They, on the other hand, asked the Prime Minister to use his authority to stop this attempt at paralysing the administration. The 'mass upsurge' was not a spontaneous popular movement but the result of a calculated plan prepared by the party in whose name the Prime Minister was ruling the country. The main force behind the 'upsurge' was the hope given to the participants of the 'liberation struggle' that the Centre would intervene and dismiss the Communist Government of Kerala, if only 'enough trouble is created for a sufficiently long time'. Would Prime Minister Nehru disabuse them of this, would he make it clear that there was no question of dismissing a ministry which enjoyed the confidence of the legislature; would he use the authority of his government and his position as leader of the nation to put a stop to the efforts to 'paralyse the administration'—these were the questions posed to him.

The questions were answered by the Prime Minister not in words but in action. He advised the President to dismiss the Kerala ministry. The only ground on which this step was taken was that 'the normal constitutional machinery has ceased to function', because, let us add, the Prime Minister's own colleagues were acting with the declared objective of 'paralysing the administration'.

This was undoubtedly a victory for the Congress in Kerala,

whose leaders got what they wanted. But, as we shall see in the following pages, it was a 'pyrrhic victory', the beginning of the growing and protracted crisis of Congress policy which, in the end, further isolated the Congress from the people of Kerala and led to a situation in which the state of Kerala was finally and irrevocably lost to the Congress.

Let us, in the meantime, put on record that the way in which the Communist Ministry functioned for towo years and four months and the way in which it was in the end dismissed was a moral and political victory for the left progressive forces represented by the Communist Party. For, this was the first ministry in Kerala to function without internal crises; not a single one of its 65 MLAs fell for the tempting offers placed before them. The Ministers also created a record for personal integrity and incorruptibility—again unheard-of in a state notorious for the personal corruption of ministers. As for the policies pursued by the ministry, it is admitted that they provided a lot of immediate relief to the people, even though, as a state Government functioning under an all-India set-up, the ministry could not go beyond the limits set by the central leadership of the Congress. Above all, even in the midst of the biggest hysterical attacks, the ministry did not lose its head, did not resort to such semi-fascist measures as preventive detention. It was with the support of masses whom it was serving, combined with the ordinary law,rather than with emergency powers. that the ministry proposed to deal with the "mass upsurge" whipped up against it. Not a single truthful observer could thus say that this Government deserved to be dismissed unless, of course, the Communists are to be barred from ministerial offices for all time.

Let us also note that the mid-term election which followed (in February 1960) exposed the claim made by the Congress leaders that they dismissed a ministry which had lost the confidence of a section of the people who were behind it in 1957. The Party and its allies increased its votes by 12 lakhs in 1960 as compared to 1957 ; the percentage of votes rose from 40 to 44. The concerted anti-Communist campaign launched by the combined opposition, obviously proved a damp squib so far as the class-conscious and radical masses were concerned. The

Communist Party came out of the ordeal a stronger and more popular party.

V

The Congress-led united front of anti-Communism, forged at the time of the 1959 "liberation struggle", was a mixture of political, socio-economic and religious forces which had nothing in common except their hatred for the Communist Government.

On the one hand was the ruling Congress party which was the leader of the united front ; on the other were the PSP and the Muslim League which were in opposition to the Congress.

On the one side were avowed opponents of the Agrarian Relation Bill and other radical legislations introduced by the Communist Government—big landlords, plantation owners and other vested interests. On the other were the (Revolutionary, Praja and other) "Socialists" according to whom the policies and practices of the Communist Government were "not radical enough".

At one end was the Catholic Church, the spearhead of anti-Communism, the organizer of the anti-Communist front and the Christopher organisation. At the other end were "Revolutionary Socialists" for whom "Marxism-Leninism was an article of faith",

Brought together in the United Front ware also the leaders of the major caste and communal groupings such as the Nairs, the Christians, the Muslims and the Ezhavas who had, in the past, shown that each of them fights the other for the preservation and strengthening of its "own" caste or communal interests.

The unity of such heterogeneous groups with conflicting interests to serve their common objective was praded before the people as a "magnificent achievement"—something which "could not be accomplished even in the days of freedom struggle".

"Kerala which had aquired notoriety for its caste and communal politics has shown the way to real national integration". "The days of political instablity caused by factional squabbles within the ruling party are coming to an end ; an era of unity of all democratic (Congress and opposition) forces is opening" !!

The falsity of such claims, however, began to unfold itself in the first few weeks after the dismissal of the Communist ministry. The Revolutionary Socialists, the Lohia Socialists and some other groups refrained from joining the electoral united front of the Congress, PSP and the Muslim League (though they did not join the Communists either). Even whithin the triple alliance, difficulties arose on the character of the United Front. The PSP and the Muslim Legue wanted their senior partner to commit itself to the formation of a coalition government after the election. This, however, could not be done becuse the central leadership of the Congress had to consider the serious all-India repercussions of a coalition, particularly with the Muslim League.

A crisis was in the end avoided : the PSP and the Muslim League expressed their willingness to be satisfied with a division of seats—no common programme, no pledge to the formation of a coalition ministry. The Congress, however, agreed to the practice of joint (three party) campaign, including the flying of the three flags together in all election meetings. This was enough for the Muslim League leaders to tell their ranks that they were going to have a coalition government . At the same time, the central Congress leadership could appease the anti-Muslim League sections of its own ranks and supporters that it was just a "no-mutual-contest arrangement".

This, however, could not continue after the election. The triple alliance won 95 seats out of 126, but the Congress had only 64, the PSP and the League winning 20 and 11 respectively. A coalition was unavoidable from the practical end. All the more was it a moral responsibility arising out of the commitments made during the election campaign. But a coalition with the Muslim League would be embarrassing to the central Congress leadership. How to avoid this and yet preserve the unity

of the triple alliance ?

Protracted negotiations went on for a fortnight and an agreed formula was worked out in the end: a tripartite legislature party in which the League would be an equal partner of the PSP and the Congress; a Congress-PSP ministry with no representation for the League; the PSP leader to be the Chief Minister and the Congress leader to be the deputy Chief Minister; and the League leader to be elected the Speaker of the Legislature. This was expected to give some satisfaction both to the League and the Congress; the former could claim that the coalition legislature party was the ruling party of which it was an equal partner; the latter could say that the League was not a part of the ministry. Both would, of course, have to admit that there was an element of compromise, but that was justifiable, since this alone could help them to keep the hated Communists out!

The formula looked acceptable on paper. The arrangement worked for a year-and-a-half (from February 1961). But it contained within itself the seeds of discontent in all parties. Repeated crises broke out in the relations between the parties and within each of them. Each of these crises was overcome by the same method of compromise, overcome only for the time being. The solution of one crisis became the starting point from which a fresh crisis began developing. This unending process went on till the Muslim League was forced out of thc legislature party in November 1961, the PSP in October 1962, and a section of the Congress itself in 1964.

When this process was completed, the Congress rump of the old three party coalition was defeated in the legislature on a no-confidence motion. The notorious anti-Communist coalition of 1957-59 came to as ignoble an end as the "pure" Congress and one PSP ministries which had preceded it.

The Congress leadership did not lose hope even at this stage. True to the proverbial drowning man, they clutched at the straw of a split in the Communist Party. They calculated that, if only a united front of the two Communist parties between themselves and with other left parties could be prevented, a repeti-

tion of 1957 could be avoided. This did not appear very difficult. The right-wing Communists proved themselves more anxious to "isolate the anti-national left Communists" (who, according to them, had "split the Communist Party at the behests of the Chinese Communists") and to "defeat the reactionary communal Muslim League" than to defeat the Congress. The campaign material brought out by the right-wing Communists thus became the biggest weapon in the hands of the Congress leaders not only for their political campaign but also for a countrywide swoop on the left-wing Communist Party. This was expected to "isolate the left Communists among the people", prevent the formation of a united front of leftist forces and thus pave the way for a Congress victory in the mid-term election that was coming.

These hopes, however, were fulfilled only partly—and that, too, thanks to the disruptive game played by the right-wing Communists. The right-wing Communist party and its ally (RSP) successfully sabotaged the efforts for the formation of a united front to defeat the Congress through their inflexible stand on electoral adjustments. Having done this, they proceeded to organize a political—practical campaign that was obviously meant to assure the defeat of as many "left Communist" or allied candidates as possible. The result was that as many as eleven "left Communist" or allied candidates lost their seats in constituencies where the right Communists or their allies lost their deposits. It was this policy of "trying to secure the defeat of left Communists even if in the process the right Communists lose their deposits" that prevented a clear majority for the "left Communists" and their allies.

The Congress, however, failed in its two main objectives—isolating the "left Communists", and securing for the Congress the position of "first party" in the new legislature. The much-hated, much-maligned "Left Communists" became the first party (40 seats), while the Cougress had only 36. Far more damaging to the prestige of the Congress was that 29 out of the 40 successful "left communist" candidates were those who had been arrested and detained on the charge of being "Chinese

agents". Added to the 40 "left Communists" were 18 others (13 SSP and five Independents) who had pledged themselves to support a "left Communist" Government. Such a Government would have been formed if only the right Communists had refrained from contesting those seats where they actually lost their deposits.

This record of the "left Communists", plus the ignoble rout of the right Communists (only three seats won out of 100 contested; loss of deposits in 75), showed that the persistent and malicious campaign of "pro-China, anti-nationalism" was dismissed with contempt by the people of Kerala. The people were clear about their political aim - to remove the Congress from power. They were clear also about the means to attain the aim—facilitate the formation of, and support, a Government of left democratic parties, groups and individuals in which the "left Communists" would play a big role.

VI

How did such a basic change in the situation take place ? Why did the much-lauded "unity of democratic forces" break ? What was it that made it possible for the Communists who were supposed to have been "given a crushing defeat" in 1960 to stage a come-back in 1965 ? How can one explain the fact that, when the Communists did finally stage a come-back, it was the "anti-national, pro-China" leftists, rather than the "national-patriotic" rightists, who became the challenge to the Congress ?

Efforts are made to answer these questions by blaming everything on personal, caste and communal factors. The break-up of the Congress-PSP-Muslim League alliance, it seems, was the result of the personal ambitions of some leaders. Caste and communal squabbles are assigned major roles in alienating the PSP from the Congress and in splitting the Congress itself into the "official" and "dissident" Congresses. As for the right and left wings of the Communist Party, it is asserted, the personal influence and prestige of some leaders are the reasons why the left is stronger.

A moment's consideration would bring out the utter superficiality of these "explanations". No attempt at ascribing the break-up of the Congress-PSP-League coalition to personal ambitions would convince anybody unless two further questions are answered : why did the same thing happen to every previous Congress (and PSP) Ministry? Why did it not happen to the only Communist Ministry which functioned longer than any other (Congress or PSP) Ministry—that too with no internal crisis ?

Caste-communal factors, too, would not explain these big political phenomena, since it is well-known that the support which the united Communists secured in 1960 and the "left Communists" in 1965 cut across all castes and communities. The big Muslim vote secured by the "left" Communists in 1965 even as against the Muslim League and the relations of friendly cooperation which exist between the Communists and the leaders of what was once the Catholic-led anti-Communist front, show that caste-communal factors play a relatively minor role in the development of the Communist movement.

Both in relation to the personal ambitions of leaders as well as to caste-communal factors, therefore, a difference exists between the Congress and its allies on the one hand and the Communist Party on the other. A scientific explanation should note and find the reason for this difference.

As for the greater personal influence and prestige of the "left" Communist leaders, the fact is that a larger number of party leaders (MPs, MLAs, members of the National and State Councils of the Party) were with the right wing. They should therefore have been able to shift the Party ranks to the right if the ranks were to be guided by leaders of prestige and political influence. (This actually was the hope with which the right-wing leaders started their offensive against the left. Hence their hysterical campaign against "the small group of splitters who are acting at the behest of the Chinese".) Why did this not happen ?

There is something obviously wrong with these "explana-

tions". We should go a little deeper into the factors working behind the political developments of Kerala, study them without the prejudices which guide those who give the above-mentioned "explanations".

The first fact which has got to be noted is that contrary to the image reflected in the jaundiced eyes of the anti-Communists, the Communist movement is the natural product of India's national movement. It grew out of that combination of the general anti-imperialist movement of the entire Indian people and the particular class movement of the working people—the working class in particular—which is the specific feature of the freedom movement in the Asian and African countries.

The concrete manner in which this combination was brought about in Kerala has been described in the preceding pages. The Communist Party in Kerala represents all that is progressive in the anti-caste, radical democratic aspects of the social reform movement; the spontaneous upsurge of the peasantry which merged with the national democratic freedom movement; the aspirations of the people of the former princely states for an end to autocratic rule and for the establishment of democracy; the long-cherished dream of the people of Kerala for political unification on a national (cultural-linguistic) basis; and above all, the struggles of the growing working class which, in its turn, help the peasantry and the toiling middle classes to participate in the general democratic and anti-imperialist movement as organized detachments with their own special objectives, slogans and forms of struggle. This is precisely the reason why the Party was able not only to break the monopoly of power enjoyed by the Congress but also withstand the combined offensive launched by all other political parties and organizations by way of the 1959 "liberation siruggle" and the 1960 mid-term election.

The second fact to be noted is that the essential outlook and the policies of leaders who forged the anti-Communist alliance were the very opposite of the aspirations of the masses who rallied themselves under the anti-Communist banner. This inhe-

rent coflict within the alliance could be kept suppressed under the barrage of anti-Communist demagogy so long as the Communist ministry continued in power. It could be hidden also in the period of the election campaign when the possibility was real that the Communists might be restored to power. But, as soon as the new Congress—PSP ministry with Muslim League support came to power and began to "undo the damage done by the Communists", the conflict came to the surface. The longer the ministry lasted, and the more its legislations implemented its major policies, the larger the sections of people who saw that they had more in common with the policies of the Communist ministry than with the policies of the leaders of the anti-Communist alliance.

Take, for instance, the Agrarian Relations Bill passed in the legislature just before the launching of the "liberation struggle". That bill was the target of the most fierce attack of the vested interests who financed and otherwise strengthened the "mass upsurge". Its provisions, however, were so much in the interests of the masses (including the bulk of those who rallied under the anti-Communist banner) that the coalition parties pledged themselves to implement that bill "with some further improvements". But the moment the coalition Government assumed charge, plans began to be made to "improve" the bill so as to give satisfaction to landlords and plantation owners. Every major provision in the bill—fixity of tenure, rent-reduction, right of purchase, ceiling—was so watered down that the landlords began to see in the Congress minister who piloted the amending bill their "deliverer". This created discontent not only in the ranks of the Muslim League and the PSP (who had left the coalition by the time the Congress ministry's amending bill came before the legislature), but even among Congressmen.

This discontent manifested itself not only on the question of the Agrarian Relations Bill, but on several concrete peasant issues. There was, for instance, the burning issue of mass evictions from the high ranges areas ; there was also the scandalous case of temple lands (under the management of the Devaswom Board which is controlled by a minister) being leased to some

rich people, even though these lands were in the actual possession of and cultivated by tenants. These tenants were therefore liable to be evicted, the bulk of these peasants being Catholics who had been rallied under the anti-Communist banner. The Catholics as a community were agitated over it. This naturally set Catholic Congressmen against their Nair colleagues who were in the forefront of the campaign for the evictions. A section of the Catholics went a step further and started fraternising with the Communists.

The most significant fact in connection with these developments is that the living core of the anti-Communist alliance—the lower section of the clergy and laity who had formed the anti-Communist Front—began to cooperate with the Communists. Nobody could have imagined in 1959-60 that the acknowledged leader of the anti-Communist Front, Father Vadakkan, would share plateforms with Communist leader A.K. Gopalan in peasant rallies and demonstrations. That, however, was just what happened in 1961-62. Out of this emerged the predominantly Catholic Malnad (High Range) Karshaka Union which cooperated with the Communist-led Kerala Karshaka Sangham in a large number of mass struggles, including Satyagraha, against the Congress proposals for "improving" the Agrarian Relations Bill.

This was a major development in the politics of the state. It was taking place against the background of disillusionment in the ranks of several sections of the people who had joined the anti-Communist alliance. Demoralisation among the Muslim Leaguers since they had to keep away from the ministry ; discontent within the ranks of the PSP at the way in which their leader (Chief Minister) Thanu Pillai was bossing over them and in the process bringing discredit to their party ; a sense of frustration in those anti-Communist sections of teachers who had helped the "Liberation struggle" but who now saw that "their own" Government was "amending" the Education Bill to put them completely at the mercy of school managements ; the indignation roused in all sections of the people generally—in the Congress ranks in particular—at the misdeeds of the Congress ministry which was fast becoming a synonym for

corruption; the disgust with which the people saw that the central Government "managed" to get PSP leader Thanu Pillai out of the way and "cleared" Congress Chief Minister Sankar of the serious charges of corruption (levelled by no less a person than KPCC President Govindan Nair)—these formed the background against which the Communist Party and the anti-Communist Front started working together on mass issues.

All this could not but have its impact on that section of the Congress which was fed up with the working of the Congress ministry but which was as anti-Communist as before. No more could they allow their anti-Communism to be used to perpetuate the misrule established by their leaders. They, began to oppose their leaders and their policies—at first on single issues but gradually in a more comprehensive way; at first mildly, then very sharply and strongly ; at first within their own party and in private, but subsequently in public. Making loud protestations of their "loyalty to the Congress organization and its all-India leadership" they turned the fire on the "corrupt gang which has taken power in Kerala". Completely in tune with their old anti-Communist posture, they charged the Congress leadership in Kerala with facilitating the strengthening of the Communist Party.This was the process through which what subsequently came to be known as the Kerala (Rebel) Congress began to take shape and did, in the process, bring the Congress ministry down.

To draw attention to these real political developments is not to deny the existence of personal, group, caste and communal squabbles in the leadership. They did undoubtedly play their part. They, however, could not have done so if the political background had not been favourable for their operation, if the leadership of the anti-Communist alliance was not getting isolated from the aspirations of big chunks of its followers, if from among their ranks were not emerging a new type of anti-Communists—those who would "fight the vested interests in cooperation with the Communists precisely in order to keep the masses away from the ideology of Communism".

The break-up of the anti-Communist alliance of 1959-60 is thus not accidental. It is the natural result of real socio-political

forces working in Kerala. These were the very forces whiched to the emergence of the Communist ministry in 1957-59. The effort to suppress them artificially through the formation of a combination of incompatibles could not have any lasting effect. At the very first opportunity for the break-up of this artificial creation, it had to break; and it did break.

The question still remains: why did the Communist Party get split at the very time when its policy was getting vindicated, when large sections of the former anti-Communists started looking on the Communists as comrades-in-struggle, rather than as enemies ? Why, if at all the Party was to split, should the left wing, which had all the disadvantages arising out of its being dubbed "pro-China" take over the role formerly played by the united party, and not the right with the advantages of its reputation for "patriotism" ?

The answer is that, apart from the issues of foreign policy and India's own internal policy (on which the left and right wings sharply differed), there were differences between them on the assessment of the developing situation in Kerala; that they therefore had different political-tactical approaches to this situation; and that the assessment and approach of the left wing was more in tune with the consciousness of the people of Kerala.

The left wing looked upon the break-up of the anti-Communist alliance and, as part of it, the break-up of the Congress organization in Kerala as developments favourable to the growth of the democratic and socialist movement in the country. They knew, of course, that all those who broke away from the anti-Communist alliance and from the Congress were not radical or progressives, not to speak of revolutionaries. Some of them (like those who formed the rebel Kerala Congress) were as reactionary as in fact, (in some respects even more than) the Congress. But the very fact that they broke away was favourable if only the Communists would follow Lenin's wise advice that it is necessary "to exert the utmost effort and necessarily, thoroughly, carefully, attentively and skilfully, take advantage

of every, even the smallest, fissure among the enemies, among the various groups and types of the bourgeoisie; to take advantage of every, even the smallest opportunity of gaining a mass ally, even though this ally may be temporary, vacillating, unreliable and conditional."

The right wing, on the other hand, took the stand that the emergence of groups like the Kerala Congress and the likely strengthening of the Muslim League were bigger threats to the democratic and socialist movement than the maintenance of Congress power. They did, at one stage, go to the extent of considering the PSP to be more reactionary than the Congress: at the time of the 1963 by-elections (three seats to the state legislature being filled up), they offered a division of seats between the Congress and the Communist Party in order to "defend the national policies of non-alignment, planning and socialism" against attacks from the PSP!

This pro-Congress attitude of the right wing stood in contrast to the left-wing stand that the Communist Party should have unifront with all socialist and left opposition parties and some adjustments with the Muslim League. The difference between the two divided the party from top to bottom: while the majority of the top took the rightist stand, the majority down below agreed with the left. It was the conflict between these two political approaches that ultimately led to an open split in the party. Naturally, therefore, when the split actually came into the open, the bulk of party members rallied behind the left.

But instead of learning from this experience, the right-wing leaders doggedly persisted in their pro-Congress line. They demanded of the left-wing Communists, the SSP and other left opposition groups that they should carry on "an equal and simultaneous struggle against the Congress on the one hand and the Kerala Congress and Muslim League on the other." Since this demand was not accepted, the right-wing Communists, along, with their allies (RSP and a few Independents) turned their fire against the left Communists and their allies (the SSP, KPT, KSP, Malnad Karshak Union and Independents) who were

accused of "allying themselves with communalism and reaction". It was this narrow sectarian approach to other opposition parties, this shamelessly right-opportunist approach to the Congress, that so isolated the right-wing Communists and their allies that they created a record in loss of deposits!

No amount of "explanations" can hide the fact that the first half of the seventh decade of this century witnessed a big fiasco of anti-Communism, a fiasco of "pro-Congress Communism".

11
Congress Replaced By Coalition Governments

The forgoing pages have shown that the Congress as a party cannot hope to win any election in the state. In no election since the 1948-49 years has the Congress won, on its own, more than one-third of the seats in the legislature (either in the former Travancore-Cochin state or in the subsequent Kerala state).

It is equally clear that the Congress cannot be expected to play a positive role in any coalition or alliance into which it may enter. The bitter experience gained by the PSP in 1954-55, and by the PSP and the Muslim League in 1960-62, shows that support to, and coalition with, other parties is, for the Congress, only a stepping stone to its own one-party rule. No self-respecting person or party can rely on the promises of support coming from the Congress.

A Congress government being thus ruled out, the only alternative is to have a coalition of non-Congress parties and groups which agree to defeat the Congress and form their own coalition government. Failure to forge such an alliance of non-Congress parties would mean that Karala would remain without a popularly-elected legislature and ministry.

This fact was sharply underlined by the result of the 1965 mid-term elections when, instead of joining the forces of opposition to the Congress, the right-wing Communists and RSP disrupted the electoral united front: disregarding reality, they insisted on a "left united front", i.e., a front excluding, and directed against, the Muslim League. The Muslim League

for its part insisted on its ties with the Kerala Congress which would not touch the Communists even with a pair of tongs.

There were thus three groupings of non-Congress parties—Muslim League-Kerala Congress alliance; Right Communist-RSP alliance; the Communist-SSP-KTP-KSP alliance (with several Independents supported by two or even three of these groupings). The mutual fight between these three groupings—particularly between the last two—helped the victory of Congress candidates in several constituencies. The result was that none of the three groupings had an absolute majority of seats in the legislature—a fact which was used by the central Government to dissolve the legislature and impose President's rule in the state.

This led to rethinking on the part of all parties.

The "left" Communists, the CPI (M), saw that their 1965 line of "a left united front with adjustment of a few seats with the Muslim League" was inadequate. What was required was to have a united front of all who were prepared to join in defeating the Congress and forming a non-Congress coalition government.

The Muslim League for its part saw the wisdom of joining the Communists, rather than continuing their alliance with the Kerala Congress.

The right Communists, too, began to realise that their 1965 line was wrong; that it was necessary to rethink their attitude to the Muslim League.

The SSP realised that their "principled stand" of "no coalition or united front on the basis of a minimum programme" would not meet the requirements of the situation, that it was necessary to have closer bonds with other opposition parties.

This process of rethinking led, in the immediate post-election months, to unity of all the left opposition parties in the struggle for civil liberties, for food, for trade union and

peasant demands. Demonstrations, hartals, strikes, satyagraha and other forms of action were organized under the joint auspices of all these parties who formed a statewide Council of Action to guide these activities.

This trend towards the unity of the left opposition parties was, for a time, interrupted by the outbreak of the Indo-Pakistan war. The CPI (M) refused to be swept into the wave of anti-Pakistan chauvinism and campaigned for a peaceful political settlement with Pakistan (as with China). The other left opposition parties, however, moved with the chauvinistic current. The right Communists went to the furthest extent, denounced the CPI (M) as "anti-national". Unity of action, therefore, could not develop as it had begun.

This gave hope and encouragement to the Congress leaders who saw in the "isolation" of the biggest opposition party their own opportunity. They began to whip up popular passions, and organize hooligan demonstrations against the CPI (M). Congress papers gave vicious calls for "hounding the anti-national party out of public life". They gleefully "reported" that the meetings and rallies organized by the CPI (M) were being disrupted by angry people. Even the Governor of the state, Congressman A.P. Jain, joined the mischievous game.

They were, however, foiled in the game. The few attempts at disruption of meetings and rallies proved miserable failures. As opposed to a dozen or so of the "patriotic" disruptors, were the thousands who put them in the proper place, not a single meeting was, in fact, disrupted. The bold campaign for peaceful settlement not only with Pakistan but with China as well, the courageous call for an attitude of give-and-take in dealing with the two neighbouring countries built a new image of the CPI (M)—the image of those who speak the truth, even though it is unpopular to begin with. This endeared them to all those who saw that the Marxists were the only people who fearlessly exposed Congress policies and practices even when such exposure appeared "unpatriotic".

The result was that the rallies held in connection with the district conventions of the Party in November-December, 1965,

were the biggest in history. It was clear that those who tried to "isolate" the CPI (M) were themselves getting isolated.

Developments in the field of national politics helped this process. The chauvinistic campaign for a fight to the finish with Pakistan could not last for more than a few days. The U.N.-sponsored cease-fire had to be agreed to. The Indian and Pakistani leaders of Government met at Tashkent and signed an agreement. These developments showed all unprejudiced people that the Congress government at the Centre had to do precisely what the "Marxists" had advocated. They were thus proved to be not only courageous but wise as well.

It was not surprising therefore that the thread of unity in the ranks of the left opposition could once again be taken up. The Council of Action, formed before the outbreak of the war with Pakistan, was activated once again. When the government decided to effect a one-fourth cut in the rice ration (from 160 to 129 grams), the Council of Action called for a one-day general strike and hartal (Kerala bandh). Popular response to the call was so magnificent that every political party, including the Congress, participated in it (though the Congress subsequently withdrew from it).

It was against this background that the State Committee of the CPI (M) called for unity of all those opposition parties—whether left or non-left—who are prepared to accept a minimum programme on the basis of which they agree to defeat the Congress, win a majority and form a non-Congress coalition government. This meant that the Party was prepared to have a coalition (and not mere adjustment of seats) with the Muslim League if the latter was prepared to accept a minimum programme.

This was followed by the right Communists whose state leadership announced that, unlike 1965, they would not non-cooperate with any left party which makes adjustments with the Muslim League, even though they themselves would have no such adjustments.

A few days after this, the All-India Council of the Muslim

League came out with a declaration that the League would be prepared to join any opposition party—whether Swatantra, Jan Sangh or Communist—in a programmatic united front to defeat the Congress and form a non-Congress Government.

This declaration of the League was hailed by the right Communists as a welcome development. The League having agreed to accept a minimum programme, the right Communists said, they would have no objection to joining the League in a united front.

The 1965 allies of the right Communists—the RSP—however, did not agree with them. They held the view that the acceptance of a minimum programme did not change the character of the League. They, therefore, would not join any united front which included the League. They were, however, prepared to make adjustments with such a united front. As for the non-Congress government to be formed after the election, they would not join it if it included the League, but would support it, since it was by and large a leftist government.

These developments in Kerala were facilitated by the growing unity of left opposition parties in other states—unity in such mass struggles as the Bengal Bandh, Bihar Bandh and so on. This unity in struggles was also sought to be extended to the field of election; several opposition parties including four operating in Kerala (the two Communist parties, the RSP and SSP) met in Delhi in July and declared as follows:

"Nineteen years of Congress misrule have brought extreme hardship and sufferings to the common people. Rising prices of essential commodities, growing unemployment, widening disparities of wealth and income, increasing dependence on outside assistance, loans, foreign capital and food imports, crushing tax burdens, wasteful government expenditure and monopoly profits have brought the country to the verge of disaster.

"It is necessary to fight these anti-people and anti-democratic policies through sustained mass struggle and give relief to the oppressed people. We pledge ourselves to work ceaselessly for

developing the movement and rid the country of Congress rule.

"The coming election provides the people with an opportunity to break the Congress stranglehold on the government, increase opposition representation and even replace the Congress administration by non-Congress popular governments.

"We declare that in order to defeat the Congress which is running the country by its reactionary and anti-people policies, we have agreed to achieve electoral adjustment with a view to avoiding mutual contest. We will also try to coordinate our election campaigns on the basis of mutual support to each other's candidates.

"We are further agreed that outside of the seats conceded to one another, these parties will be free to seek, if they so desire, adjustments with other parties which are not party to this agreement.

"We give a solemn assurance to the people that should the electorate throw the Congress out, we shall provide alternative, popular non-Congress governments and will see to it that stable legislative majorities are created for these non-Congress popular governments."

The basic question of electoral policy having thus been cleared both in Kerala as well as at the all-India level, nothing stood in the way of the emergence of a united front if agreement could be arrived at on the outlines of a minimum programme and on the distribution of seats. Congress leaders hoped, and Congress papers predicted, that the various constituents of the emerging United Front would break on either or both. They were, however, disappointed to find their hopes misplaced An unanimous agreement was reached on the policies to be pursued by the non-Congress Government; the magnificent demonstrations for Kerala's demands jointly organized by seven opposition parties, and the final agreement on distribution of seats put an end to all speculation, and made the United Front of non-Congress parties a reality.

Within three months after the formation of the United Front in Kerala, the Fourth General Elections took place. The Congress was defeated and several non Congress parties and Independents together received an absolute majority of seats in five states—the Punjab, Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa and Kerala. In the state of Madras and in the Union Territory of Delhi, single-party governments were formed by the DMK and Jan Sangh respectively.

In an eighth state, Rajasthan, there was a constitutional deadlock, since neither the Congress nor the opposition had an absolute majority. The Congress used this uncertain situation as well as the office of the State Governor, in order to manoeuvre itself back into power.

As against this gain of one state, however, the Congress lost in a few days—the state of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. These states had returned a majority of Congressmen into the legislature: Congress governments were therefore formed after the elections. In a few days, however, a section of Congressmen defected from their own organization, forged an alliance with non-Congress parties and formed non-Congress governments. Within a few weeks of the General Elections, therefore, there arose a situation in which 9 out of 17 states and one Union Territory did have non-Congress governments.

This was an entirely new all-India situation, which could not but have its impact in Kerala.

12

Anti-Communist Front

The formation of the seven-party United Front which won a resounding victory in the election that followed was a significant development in the politics not only of Kerala but of the whole country. It showed that the split in the Communist movement had not prevented the two parties, into which it had got split, from coming together in the struggle against the Congress monopoly of power.

The RSP which had kept aloof from the united Communist Party when the latter formed the first non-Congress government in the state and which joined the CPI when the Party got split, also joined the new coalition against the Congress. So did the Socialist Party, the KSP, the newly-formed Karshaka Thozhilali Party and the Muslim League—all of them active participants in the anti-Communist "liberation struggle" of 1959 and in the electoral front of 1960.

Like its counterpart in West Bengal, the Kerala United Front brought together a broad spectrum of political forces which are left-oriented as well as those which are generally democratic, though not of a specifically left complexion. Unlike the West Bengal front, however, it was the dominant force in the legislature, in Kerala the Congress and the Kerala Congress in the opposition having been reduced to 9 and 6 respectively in a House of 133.

This overwhelming strength of the coalition in the Legislature in quantitative terms however, concealed its qualitative weakness. The ruling coalition's massive numerical strength—around

115 out of 133—was counter-balanced by the fact that the constituents of the coalition included, as in West Bengal the CPI (M) and the CPI which had conflicting perceptions of the political situation in the country. They came into the coalition in the wake of bitter protracted struggle over policies as well as organization. The memories of this struggle haunted them at every step.

While this in general may be true of both parties, the CPI was prone to be particularly bitter towards the CPI (M), since it had suffered at the CPI(M)'s hands the humiliating electoral defeat in the mid term elections. Flaunting its "international connections" as well as "national character" i.e., being recognised as "the real CPI" by the fraternal parties headed by the CPSU and having greater representation in a larger number of State legislatures in the country, the CPI leaders felt that they were entitled to get larger representation in the Kerala legislature than was allowed to them in the correlation of political forces in the State while the CPI (M) was dominant within the coalition. This made them raise the bogey of "big party bossism" against the CPI (M).

The RSP joined hands with the CPI since it was the latter's partner in the anti-CPI (M) campaign during the 1965 mid-term elections. It simply transferred its traditional hostility to the united Communist Party to its major section, i.e., the CPI (M).

These two left parties raised the banner of revolt against the CPI (M) within the seven party coalition during the very first few months of the seven-party regime. Between these two parties themselves, the CPI took the initiative in "exposing" the CPI (M), the performance of its ministers and the "big bossist" attitude of that party to its front partners. It was joined in the campaign by the RSP to begin with and subsequently by a section of the Socialists and the Muslim League. The Congress-Kerala Congress Opposition and the monopoly press, of course, gave powerful support.

II

The CPI fired the first shot at the Food Minister, accusing her of inefficiency and wrong policies which allegedly led to an extremely serious situation. In making this allegation, they were obviously shielding the Central Government whose responsibility it was for keeping the public distribution system in the highly deficit State supplied with its requirements.

The same thing was done later against other CPI(M) ministers who were in charge of General Administration, Home, Forests, Transport and Revenue. The monopoly press not only gave publicity to the charges levelled against the CPI (M) ministers by the CPI but added their own. These latter in their turn were utilised by the CPI in its campaign of vilification against the CPI (M).

This tirade against individual ministers belonging to the CPI (M) was subsequently turned into a concerted attack on the Party and its policies. The spokesmen of the CPI demanded of the CPI (M) that the latter give up its normal activity as the militant party of the working class—mobilizing the working people in struggle against the exploiting classes. This activity of the Party was denounced as inconsistent with the Party's role as a ruling party. "Either give up the agitational approach and remain in the Government, or go out of the Government and carry on your agitation"—such was the "advice" tendered by the CPI leaders to the CPI (M). The spokesmen of the latter for their part asserted their right to remain in the Government on the strength of the popular verdict. As for the "agitational approach" the CPI (M) made it clear that, as the militant party of the working class, it cannot give up the basic stand of remaining with the fighting people.

The inner-party struggle within the CPI (M), which led to the emergence of the break-away Naxalite group going in for quite a few adventurist actions like the attack on a police station and several murders, was used by all the enemies of the CPI (M), including the CPI leaders. to denounce and isolate the party among the people. The CPI did it in a two-fold way: on the one

hand, it said that the Naxalites and their adventurist actions are the result of the "sectarian" stand of the CPI (M) and, therefore, the Party should be held responsible for all that has been done by the Naxalites. On the other hand, it joined the chorus of the Naxalites themselves against "police atrocities", allegedly committed by the police under the orders of the "Marxist Chief Minister". Its leaders in other words attacked the CPI (M) for having inspired the Naxalites for their adventurist activities but organized "defence committees" to aid the Naxalite accused. They hoped to "isolate" the CPI (M), "cut it to size" by launching such an apparently contradictory but well-planned attack.

Another line of attack made by the RSP was to level corruption charges formally directed in the beginning against both the CPI (M) and the CPI. They, in fact, intended to hit the CPI (M). The RSP leader Srikantan Nair prepared a memorandum and submitted it to the Coordination Committee of the United Front, demanding that investigation should be made and necessary action taken concerning the charges. While formally being a document for discussion in the Coordination Commitee, it was leaked out into the Press and became the basis for a concerted campaign against the CPI (M). The CPI and the opposition parties together with the monopoly press took up the charges and made them the basis of a concerted anti-CPI (M) campaign.

It was these "charges of corruption" that provided the basis on which the CPI and the RSP, together with the Muslim League and a section of the Socialist party from the ruling coalition, joining hands with the Congress-Kerala Congress Opposition, succeeded two years later in pulling the Government down. The facts leading up to this development may now be summarised :

1. Certain specific allegations were made against one of the ministers, Health Minister Wellington, who did not belong to the CPI (M) but to the Karshaka Thozhilali Party. The Coordination Committee discussed the charges and authorised the

Chief Minister to examine the material and come to a decision whether there is a *prima facie* case for instituting a judicial enquiry.

2. On an examination of the material placed before him, the Chief Minister found that there was no *prima facie* case. However, he added that, if there is any further material, it can and will be gone into. The decision in the case referred to, therefore, was that a judicial enquiry is not warranted.

3. Against this decision of the Chief Minister, a motion was moved in the Legislature demanding a judicial enquiry into the charges against Wellington. This was passed bacause, while the anti-CPI (M) groups in the Legislature were by themselves a minority not only in the Legislative Assembly but in the United Front Assembly Party as well, their motion was supported by the Congress - Kerala Congress Opposition. Thus began the open collaboration between the Congress - Kerala Congress Opposition and the "mini-front" within the coalition.

4. The Chief Minister was thus forced to order a judicial enquiry. However, since there was no *prima facie* case for such an enquiry into this case and since there were charges against some other ministers (belonging to the CPI, the RSP, the Muslim League and the Socialist Party) where too there was no *prima facie* case, the Chief Minister considered it unfair to order judicial enquiry into only one case. All the cases in which there were allegations but on which no *prima facie* case had been made out were therefore placed before the judicial enquiry commission.

5. Enraged by this, the mini-front moved a motion in the Assembly directing the Chief Minister to order a judicial enquiry into the ministers belonging to the CPI (M), the KSP and the KTP. The name of the Chief Minister himself, however, was left out. This too was adopted in the House through the joint vote of the Congress - Kerala Congress opposition and those constituents of the ruling coalition which had by then come to be known as the "mini-front".

6. At the very beginning of the debate on this motion, it had been made perfectly clear by the Chief Minister that, if it is adopted by the combined vote of the "mini front" and the Opposition, he would have no option but to resign. The motion was passed and the ministry resigned.

III

The whole game was obviously to use the "charges of corruption" against an individual minister to begin with in order to cut the "big bossist" CPI (M) to size, wean away as many constituents of the coalition as possible from the CPI (M), expand the area of "corruption charges" as required and to bring about a realignment of political forces in the State. The strategies of the ruling Congress Party at the Centre, the all-India leadership of the CPI, the Congress-Kerala Congress Opposition in the State as well as those constituents of the ruling coalition in the State who together formed the anti-CPI (M) "mini front" happened to coincide here. The "charges of corruption" were only the alibi to carry out this common strategy.

This, in fact, was subsequently acknowledged by no less a person than Achutha Menon, one of the top-most leaders of the CPI in the State who took over as Chief Minister within a week of the fall of the United Front ministry.

In a letter written to Father Vadakkan, the leader of the Karshaka Thozhilali Party, explaining why his party and its allies has to take these steps against Wellington, Menon wrote that they had nothing against Wellington or his party as such. They were forced to resort to this method, he went on, because he was acting "in complete subservience to the Marxists".

In another letter written to the former Chief Minister of the CPI(M). Menon wrote that while a judicial enquiry was demanded against all other CPI(M) ministers, he (the Chief Minister) was excluded from its purview because they had hoped that he would be "sensible enough to reconstitute the front and the ministry".

The laying of "corruption charges", demanding and ordering judicial enquiries, were thus admittedly a political weapon in the hands of the opponents of the CPI(M) to bring the Government down.

An important all-India political development had in the meanwhile taken place, facilitating such a realignment of political forces leading to the "isolation" of the CPI(M), its transformation from the leading constituent of the ruling coalition to the major opposition party in the State. This was the turmoil in the Congress party after its electoral defeat of 1967 which was further confirmed by the mini general elections of 1969. Following the latter; a vertical split occurred inside the ruling Congress party –between the so-called "syndicate" led by Morarji Desai, Nijalingappa and so on and the Congress led by Indira Gandhi.

Championing as the latter did the cause of bank nationalisation, abolition of privy purses to princes, and so on the parties of the Left, including the CPI(M) and the CPI supported it in its fight against the "syndicate". It was in fact the support of the Left that helped the candidate of the Indira Congress for the Presidential election, V.V. Giri, to win in August 1969. This was followed in the course of three months by the open split of the ruling Congress party into the Congress(R) and Congress(O)

While the CPI (M) and the CPI had adopted an identical stand on extending support to the Indira Congress and its Central Government on such questions as bank nationalisation, Presidential election and abolition of privy purses, the two differed from each other on the assessment of the nature of the split and consequently, the tactics that should be adopted. While the CPI(M) looked upon the split in the ruling party as a manifestation of two tactical approaches within the framework of the same general policies of the ruling classes, the CPI considered it a division of great ideological and political significance. It required in their opinion a change in the Left parties' approach to the ruling Congress party, the abandonment of.

confrontation with it, the adoption of a policy of cooperation. Hostility to the CPI(M) was thus supplemented by a "constructive attitude" to the ruling Congress party.

As for the RSP, its all-India leadership did not toe the CPI line. It continued to pursue the line of opposition to the Congress, both at the all-India level as well as in West Bengal where it was a partner of the CPI (M) in the united front and the Government. When the United Front and its Government in West Bengal were toppled in March 1970, the RSP refused to adopt the CPI line and went along with the CPI (M) and its Left allies.

In Kerala, on the other hand, the state leadership of the RSP continued its anti-CPI (M) line which it had earlier shared with the CPI. The Kerala RSP, therefore, was expelled by its all-India leadership and continued in the State as a purely State party.

The two Left Parties having thus joined hands with the Congress and Kerala Congress against the CPI (M), there was no difficulty for the Muslim League and a section of the Socialist Party to go along with them.

IV

For the CPI, however, it was by no means easy to make a complete turn by transforming itself from the partner of an anti-Congress coalition to the partner in a new coalition in which the Congress was a major partner. It had to adopt in the beginning a political stance of continuing the old left-oriented non-Congress coalition out of which the CPI (M), the KSP, the KTP and a section of the Socialists have been excluded. The CPI Chief Minister who took over within a week of the fall of the coalition Government, Achutha Menon, declared that he would quit the moment it was known that he could remain in office only with the support of the Congress. He also declared that the job of the Government headed by him would be to carry out the measures adopted by the earlier Government—measures which the CPI (M) had refused to

carry out by quitting the ministry.

In constituting the new ministry, therefore, the Congress was not included while the Kerala Congress was taken. It was only after the subsequent mid-term elections that the question of Congress participation was mooted; for a year even after the election, the Congress kept out of office. These manoeuvres were necessary for the CPI to make a complete turn from the earlier policy of opposition to the Congress to the new one of collaboration with it.

As far as the Congress party was concerned such a change in the attitude of the CPI and its left ally, the RSP, proved to be a god send. It had become clear from the developments since 1957 that the Congress by itself, or even with such allies of a rightist or communal character, cannot win the majority of the electorate and provide a Government. Nor could it repeat the 1959 experiment of unleashing a "mass upsurge" and topple the CPI (M)-led Government since the all-India situation had turned completely against it.

Here, however, is an opportunity for the Congress to wean away a section of the Left, even while mobilizing all the rightist, communal and casteist forces, in order to come back to power. From a small group of nine members in 1967, it could rise to a 32-strong Party, the biggest single coalition partner in a set-up formally headed by the CPI and including two other Leftist groups—the RSP and a section of the Socialists. The Congress, therefore, should be grateful to the CPI, the RSP and a section of the Socialists for having rehabilitated it from the depths of isolation and defeat.

V

A good deal of controversy has taken place during the last decade and more on the line adopted by the CPI to the Left oriented non-Congress Governments of Kerala and West Bengal. It may, therefore, be proper to conclude this chapter by giving an extract from the subsequent assessment made by the CPI at its Bhatinda Congress in 1978 on the mistakes committed by them during this period.

"The party leadership came to the mistaken understanding that a split has taken place between the anti-imperialist democratic sections of the bourgeoisie and the pro-imperialist, most reactionary pro-monopoly, pro-landlord, anti-Communtist sections and that the Emergency could be used to bring about progressive shifts in the correlation of forces and State power in a national democratic direction. Thereby the progressive potentialities of the national bourgeoisie and Indira Gandhi's Government, and the capacity of our party and other democratic forces to bring about these positive shifts in the situation were over-estimated. The potentialities of the favourable international situation and the progressive foreign policy in relation to its impact upon the internal situation were understood in a very mechanical manner. It was insufficiently realised that the fight against the increasingly anti-people internal policies of the Indira Gandhi Government had to be given priority by our party even while supporting its anti-imperialist foreign policy as well as its progressive internal measures. It was not properly realised that a progressive foreign policy cannot eventually be safeguarded without progressive internal policies." (Document of Eleventh Congress, p. 67).

It is thus obvious that the charge of "big bossism", the political and organizational attacks on the individual ministers belonging to the CPI (M) and the "corruption charges" on the basis of which the CPI (M)-led Government was pulled down in 1969 were all so many pegs on which to hang the political line of collaboration with the Congress which has at last been admitted to have been a mistake.

13
Political Realignment

The anti-CPI(M) front which emerged in 1969-70 was called in the last chapter "anti-Communist Front—Second Edition". It continued for more than a full decade, i.e. till the end of 1979, though cracks began to apper even earlier. The two-and-a-half years that elapsed since the 1977 general elections which threw the Congress out of power at the Centre was, in fact, a period of intense struggle within the anti-CPI (M) front. Ranged against each other were those who fought for cooperation with the CPI (M) culminating in an alliance and those who persisted in the pro-Congress (I) and anti-CPI (M) line.

Although the CPI, the RSP and a section of the Socialists collaborated with the Congress in toppling the CPI(M)-led united front and Government in October 1969 and in bringing into existence the anti-CPI (M) front and Government headed by the CPI's Achutha Menon as Chief Minister, the Congress did not join the ministry. It was not easy for any of them or for the Congress itself, to work in a coalition Government. Each faction wanted to engage itself in one or the other manoeuvre.

These manoeuvres were facilitated by the apparently "leftist" demagogy resorted to by the ruling Congress party and its Government at the Centre after 1969. Beginning with the nationalisation of banks and abolition of privy purses to princes, the leadership of the party and the Government went forward to the much-publicised programme of "garibi hatao".

This was, of course, the facade behind which the leader of the ruling party was trying to conceal her supremacy within the

party and in the Government, defeating her rival party, i.e., the Syndicate Congress and lanuching a full-scale attack on the most consistent force fighting on the side of the working people —the CPI (M). It, however, could be hidden behind a "leftist" screen which enabled the leadership of the ruling party not only to create a division and split in the Left movement within the country but also to win over a substantial section of the international movement, including the leaderships of several Socialist countries.

Unlike the anti-Communist front of 1959-60, the anti-CPI (M) front of a decade later was not openly right-dominated. Along with the major political forces of the right, the caste and communal organizations, which had rallied behind the earlier as well as the present front, a section of the leftist movement too was ranged against the CPI (M) and its allies. It included that section of Indian Communists whom, according to a majority of the fraternal Communist and Workers' Parties, represented India's Communist movement.

It should be noted further that the allies of the CPI(M) now included some who were part of the old anti-Communist front. The opponents of the CPI(M) made big noise about this making it appear as if the CPI(M) was allying itself with the "right" in order to fight the leftist front and Government.

In fact, however, all these allies of the CPI(M) were in the seven-party united front of 1967-69 when the CPI and the RSP too were in the alliance. The only "sin" they committed was that they did not agree with the CPI and the RSP in joining hands with the Congress-Kerala Congress opposition to topple the CPI(M)-led front and Government; when the toppling exercise was in fact over, they went into the opposition along with the CPI(M). The concerted political campaign organised by the anti-CPI(M) front with the powerful support of the monopoly press, concerning "the CPI (M)'s right reactionary allies" however made the struggle of the CPI (M) and its allies far more arduous than what the united CPI had to wage a decade earlier.

II

The need of the ruling Congess and the CPI to maintain the "leftist" image gave rise to two contradictory features of the situation in the State : on the one hand, the Central Government had to adopt an apparently positive attitude towards the popular measure adopted by the United Front Government when it had been headed by the CPI (M) ; on the other, the new Kerala regime had to see to it that the programme of mass mobilization for the implementation of those measures—to which the CPI (M), its allies in the Opposition front as well as the mass organizations of workers, peasants, etc , gave leadership—was dealt with in a ruthless fashion.

In other words, while the CPI's political leadership of the anti-CPI (M) front claimed that the good work that was done by the earlier United Front was being carried forward under the new Government, the full powers of the Government were used to unleash a campaign of police repression and goonda attacks against the most vital force in the earlier United Front.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the field of agrarian reforms. Unlike 1959-60 when the anti-Communist front trained its guns against the Agrarian Relations Bill adopted by the Legislature before the Communist ministry was toppled and when they saw to it that the Presidential assent to the Bill was withheld, the Land Reform Bill that was adopted a week before the seven-party Government had to resign was immediately given the assent. The Bill that was passed in the third week of October received the assent by the middle of December and came into force on the first of January.

The reason for this was, of course, not a change in the attitude of the ruling Congress party but a change in the situation. The CPI and RSP who were partners of the new coalition could not carry on unless the Central Government abandoned its earlier attitude to agrarian reforms and allowed the implementation of the legislative measure adopted before the United Front Government resigned.

The CPI (M) and its allies for their part had declared that, since the rural vested interests in collusion with powerful sections within the administration would do their worst to sabotage the implementation of the measure, the rural poor should organize themselves and see that the provisions of the legislation were implemented in practice. A massive rally of the rural poor organized under the auspices of the United Front of radical political parties and the mass organizations of peasants and agricultural labourers declared on December 14 that "whether the president gives his assent or not", the rural poor would consider the Bill as having become law and assert their right : the landless hutment dwellers would take possession of the area to which they are entitled under the provisions of the law and start enjoying the fruits of whatever is produced on that plot of land. The tenants would cease to pay any rent to the landlord.

At the very time when tens of thousands of peasants and agricultural labourers were gathering for the rally, the Central Government's notification came regarding the Presidential assent and the coming into force of the law beginning with January 1, 1970.

This announcement was obviously made with a view to reduce the militancy of peasants and agricultural labourers fighting for the implementation of land reforms for which the call was given by the organizers of the rally. In fact, however, it became a morale booster. The rural poor in their tens of thousands resorted to direct action by way of what was denounced by their opponents as "land grabbing". This denunciation by the opponents was countered by the organizations of the rural poor and by the radical political parties supporting them, with the assertion that what they were doing was actually to prevent "land grabbing" by the landlords. If they were to wait for the red tape through which the bureaucracy proposed to confer the benefits of the land legislation on the hutment dwellers and tenants, they would be powerless against the landlords who, with the direct and indirect support of the bureaucracy, would deprive them of the land to which they are entitled under the provisions of the law. It was, therefore, demanded on their behalf that the bureaucratic machinery should, instead of denouncing them for "land

grabbing" and unleashing repression on them, give formal administrative recognition of what they are doing on their own.

This militant action resorted to by the organizations of the rural poor supported by the radical political parties made a big difference between Kerala and the Congress-ruled States in the matter of implementation of land reforms. As a matter of fact ever since 1957 when the Communist Government took the initial step of banning all eviction pending the formulation of a comprehensive agrarian reform legislation, the rural poor under the leadership of the Kisan Sabha, the Agricultural Labour Organisation and the radical political parties have been resorting to direct action for supplementing whatever legislative and administrative measures are adopted.

Had it not been for similar militant popular action, the anti-eviction ordinance issued in less than a week after the swearing-in of the Communist Government would have remained on paper as so many legislations have been in Congress-ruled States. Here, however, was a relatively powerful Kisan Sabha with a long history of militant struggle over two decades. It saw to it that the provisions of the anti-eviction ordinance were enforced, that the landlords and their supporters in the administration were not permitted to circumvent the provisions of the legislation. Neither the toppling of the Communist Government nor the witholding of the Presidential assent for the Agrarian Relations Bill deterred the mass organizations of the rural poor supported by the radical political forces from organizing resistance to the vested interests and their supporters in the administration.

The result was that in the entire *jenmi*-dominated districts of Kerala, the tenants could stick to their land with no fear of eviction, paying virtually no rent. The Land Reform Bill of the 1967-69 United Front Government was a continuation of the earlier Agrarian Relations Bill, and these gains of the earliet legislation supplemented by mass action came to be consolidated. Together with these were new gains won by the mass of landless hutment dwellers who became entitled to their home-

steads with an area of ten cents each.

III

As against this gain of the rural poor, however, was the toughening of the administrative machinery which followed the emergence of the United Front between a section of the Leftist movement and the rightist forces including the Congress Party.

It may be recalled in this connection that more important than the legislative and administrative measures adopted by the Communist Government of 1957-59 was its police policy which did not permit the police to intervene in labour, agrarian or other struggles of the working people. This was acknowledged to be a significant departure from the methods adopted by the earliear Congress Governments who made it their first and most important job to meet every popular resistance to vested interests with brutal repression. Not even the anti-Communist, PSP-Congress Governments of 1960-64 could go back to the pre-1957 Congress Governments' practices.

The new alliance between a section of the Left and the Congress, however, made it possible for the top echelons of the police machinery and the vested interests not only to go back to the pre-1957 months but to make them still tougher. No sooner had the seven-party coalition Government resigned in the latter half of October 1969 than was terror unleashed on the mass of the rural and urban poor. The much-denounced "land grab" movement was made the excuse for letting loose the most unprecedented terror against those who were trying to assert the rights which have been conferred on them by law. Beginning with the Muslim League Home Minister who took over on November 1969 and subsequently under the Congress Home Minister who took over in 1971, the anti-CPI(M) front and its Government became notorious for its brutal repression which assumed the most inhuman forms during the nightmarish emergency regime. The torture camps organized under the Congress Home Minister became notorious throughout the country, its exposure in the now well-known Rajan case of 1976

forcing the Congress Home Minister (who subsequently became Chief Minister) to resign.

This, however, was only the culmination. Its beginnings could be seen during the days of the hutment-dwllers' struggle of 1970 itself. Men and women belonging to the rural poor were subjected to unheard of repression – firings, lathicharges, tortures in the police stations and even rapes in several cases. All these were exposed in the Opposition Press and on the floor of the Legislature. They were all dismissed not only by the leaders of the Congress party but by the CPI-RSP constituents of the anti-CPI(M) front. The Congress headed by Indira Gandhi could therefore claim the credit for securing the support of a section of the Left for its anti people brutal attacks on the democratic movement.

The working class and middle-class employees in the urban areas too came under attack. Their struggles were crushed with an iron hand. Several hundreds were thrown out and other punishments meted out. The attack on the rural poor assumed huge proportions.

The CPI-RSP Leftist combination in their turn thought that, by giving their support to the Congress in these brutal attacks, they were strengthening the so-called "anti-imperialist and radical" trends in the Congress. They also thought that their united front with the "progressive" section of the bourgeoisie would help them to isolate the "sectarian" CPI(M) and its allies. They, therefore, gave continuous calls on the ranks of the CPI(M) to revolt against their leadership and join the "mainstream" of the Congress-Communist combine.

The CPI(M) and its allies, however, were able not only to weather the storm of this many-sided offensive but also to mount a counter-offensive, and to lay the basis for the future return to the fold of those who were misled by their political line. While resisting the police and other administrative attacks on them and while carrying on an ideological-political offensive against the collaborationist line of the CPI and the RSP, the Left Opposition appealed to the thinking

sections of the ruling coalition including those within the Congress. While being firm on questions of immediate struggle, they adopted flexible attitudes on the relatively long-ranging issues, so that at least the middle leaders as well as the ranks of the parties belonging to the ruling coalition may gradually be won over to a policy of struggle against the vested interests and against the Congress leadership which was becoming more and more authoritarian.

IV

These efforts on the part of the CPI (M) and its allies had some partial success in that divisions began to appear among those who had originally formed the anti-CPI(M) front. The Muslim League and the Kerala Congress were the first to start demarcating themselves from the rest of the anti-CPI(M) front.

The Kerala Congress, in fact, joined the other parties of the Opposition on some campaigns in resistance to repression, defence of civil liberties and democratic rights as well as on questions of mass struggles on such issues as food, and working class rights. The developing unity of action on issues was sought to be cristallized into a political united front culminating in an electoral alliance on the basis of a common minimum programme. The process however was interrupted during the emergency when, after a short period of joint struggle against the emergency, the Kerala Congress leaders allowed themselves to be ensnared into the anti-CPI(M) front.

As for the Muslim League, it did not adopt the course which the Kerala Congress did. A section of its leadership and ranks however demarcated themselves from the main organization and, as "dissident" wing broke away from the dominant majority of the party to join the CPI (M) and its allies in the Opposition.

Within the Congress too, a section calling itself the "Congress radicals" allied themselves with the Left.

Added to these developments within the various constituents of the ruling coalition were the mass agitations and struggles organized by the CITU, Kisan Sabha, Agricultural Labour Union and other militant organizations of the people. These were denounced by the spokesmen of the ruling coalition as "politically motivated", with a view to "topple the elected Government". It is true that in the surcharged atmosphere of embittered relations between the CPI (M) and its Left allies on the one hand and the CPI-RSP combination on the other, no serious dent could be made into the ranks of the parties that constituted the anti-CPI (M) ruling coalition. That was why Kerala became an exception to the general all-India trend of the "Janata wave" of 1977. Despite the coming together of the various constituents which were subsequently to form the Janta Party as well as the CPI (M) and its allies, the anti-CPI (M) front could win a massive majority of seats both in the State Legislature and in the Lok Sabha from Kerala. In fact, never before had the Left Opposition been reduced to such a miserable force in the State Legislature and with no representation at all in the Lok Sabha.

This apparent "rout" of the CPI (M) and its allies, however, concealed the truth that, although failing miserably in terms of seats in the State Legislature and in the Lok Sabha, the CPI (M) and its allies secured over 40 per cent of the votes polled in the 1977 election. Furthermore, the fall in the number of elected representatives from Kerala was counter-balanced by the victory of the Janata Party and its allies on the all-India plane. In contrast to 1957 when the Congress was successfully challenged in Kerala but was in firm control at the Centre and in all other States, the Congress was now successfully challenged at the Centre while it was in firm control in Kerala in alliance with other political parties, including the Leftist CPI and the RSP.

It was therefore clear that the situation could not continue as it was for long. In fact, it did not continue even for a month after the massive victory of the Congress-led united front. The unanimously-elected leader of the Congress-led coalition—the former Congress Home Minister who now be-

came the Chief Minister—had to bow out after remaining in office for just over three weeks.

V

With this began a chain of developments which, in less than a year's time, led to the division of the Congress itself into the Congress (I) and the Congress (S). A few months later, the Congress Chief Minister bowed out of office in protest against the pro-Indira stance adopted by his all-India leadership in relation to the by-election in Chikmagalur. The CPI had, in the meanwhile, held its 11th Congress at Bhatinda and had been involved in serious introspection, coming to the conclusion that it was wrong in some major respects (as shown ni the extracts from the Bhatinda document in the previous chapter).

These changes in the Congress and the CPI inevitably led to approaches by the CPI-RSP on the one hand and the CPI(M) on the other. The latter too, were pursuing the policies calculated to take full advantage of every move by the other parties which help the process of a new alignment of political forces in the State as well as in the rest of the country.

That it took over two and a half years after the 1977 defeat of the Congress at the all-india level for the CPI, the RSP and the Congress (S) together with one wing of the Kerala Congress, to join the CPI(M) and its allies against the Congress (I) shows the tenacity with which the anti-CPI(M) front could continue. However, after the significant changes that were taking place on the all-India political scene and review of the policies adopted by the two major all-India Left parties, the CPI(M) and the CPI—as well as the Kerala unit of another all India Left party (RSP)—it could not continue any more.

In the latter half of 1979 a Left-Democratic United Front was formed consisting of three Left parties and four other democratic parties—a front which was powerful enough to reverse the trend. Kerala in fact became an exception to the

"Indira wave" which was once again sweeping the major part of the country. The Front made possible defeat of the Congress (I) here, as the continued existence of the anti-CPI (M) front in 1977 made an exception of Kerala in the matter of the sweeping "Janata wave."

VI

History repeated itself once again. As in 1967, so now, a coalition of three left parties and four other Opposition Parties came into existence and fought the election on the basis of a common programme; it won a handsome victory following which a coalition Government of seven parties was formed.

This left-democratic Government carried forward the traditions built by the first Communist Government and the subsequent CPIM-led united front Government in formulating and implementing policies which are of immediate benefit to the common people. It followed the example set earlier by the left-front Government of West Bengal which introduced such welfare measures as pension for the aged agricultural workers and allowance for the unemployed youth. Much-needed relief was provided to the peasants and other sections of the working people.

The contrast between the earlier Congress-dominated Government and the new Left-democratic Government was clear to everybody. It was clear also to the vested interests who resorted to new intrigues, as they had done earlier against the first Communist Government and the subsequent CPI(M)-led United Front Government. They succeeded in the end in organising defection—not of individuals but of parties. The Congress (S) and the Kerala Congress (M) which were constituents of the Left-democratic front and partners of the coalition Government were persuaded to change sides from the Left-democratic Front to the Congress camp.

This led to the fall of the Left-democratic Government and to the installation of a short-lived Congress (I)-led coalition

Government, followed by new elections in which the Congress (I)-led coalition won a narrow majority : while in terms of seats it secured 55% (77 out of 140), it got only 48.27% of the votes polled (46,16,908 votes). The Left-democratic front on the other hand secured 47.28% of the votes (45,21,681). The difference in the popular vote between the two combinations was only 95,221.

The "victory" of the Congress (I)-led front was in other words a political defeat for its main organiser, the Congress (I). For, with a view to securing such a "victory", the Congress (I) which claims to be a modern secular party had to rely on the support of all the casteist and communal organisations and parties in the state. Had it not been for the support of this collections of casteist and communal forces, the Congress would have been reduced to a position still more miserable than in 1967. (It will be recalled that the pre-split Congress had in 1967 "managed" to get a mere 9 seats out of1 40).

IV

It is 20 months upto the time of writing these lines (Jan. 1984) since the Congress (I)-led Government was sworn into office. This relatively short period has witnessed such major and minor crises for the coalition that the Government was on the verge of a fall more than once.

Two constituents of the front—the Indian Union Muslim League and the Joseph group of Kerala Congress—had threatened to walk out and join the Opposition. They are still sulking.

Discontent is brewing inside the Congress (I) itself, three MLAs belonging to that party refusing to vote with the rulling front against the Opposition-sponsored no-confidence motion when it was put to the house.

The Nair-based NDP and the Ezhava-based SRP are putting forward mutually contradictory demands on the reservation issue.

Serious allegations of corruption have, in the meanwhile, been levelled against the Chief Minister himself which he is unable to refute with credibility.

It has thus become a matter of speculation how long this coalition can continue and how it will be replaced by the other coalition as the ruling force in the state.

All these developments have been taking place against the all-India background which is by no means favourable to the leader of the ruling coalition – the Congress (I). Having won two electoral victories in 1980—first to the Lok Sabha and then to 9 state legislatures— the ruling party has had to witness the gradual erosion of its political base among the people.

The two state elections which took place in 1983 saw the total defeat of the ruling party in the two Southern states which had so far been considered Congress strongholds—Andhra and Karnataka. In the series of by-elections which took place before and after these elections as well as in the recent state elections in Jammu Kashmir, the Congress could not improve on its earlier performance.

Add to these political setbacks the fact that organisationally the ruling party has become completely faction-ridden. Former Congress (I) Chief Ministers like Andhra's Chenna Reddy and Maharashtra's Antulay have publicly challenged the authority of the state leaders of their party, while another former Chief Minister Mir Qasim has joined one of the Opposition Parties.

These developments in all-India politics are giving courage to several elements in the Congress Party in Kerala to become "dissidents" in their party. The allies of the Congress (I) in the ruling coalition are seriously considering whether they stand to gain or lose by sticking to the alliance.

Parallel to these all-India developments unfavourable to the Congress (I) are the moves in the Opposition camp. The growing unity of the Left Opposition Parties and increasing

co-operation between the Left and other Opposition Parties projects the possibility of a united Opposition Front minus the RSS-dominated BJP. This emerging combination of the Left and other Opposition forces would be in a position to throw a successful challenge to the Congress (I)'s claim of being the champion of the struggle against imperialism and for peace in the world and against divisive forces and for national unity at home. The change in the co-relation of political forces which is thus taking places at the all India level will indisputably be having its impact on Kerala developments.